



5

ウメ種

イラスト・柴乃權人

# 神殺しの英雄と七つの誓約

Kanigoroshinoeiyu and Ermenhilde

エルメンヒルデ

OVERLAP



Kamigoroshi no Eiyuu to Nanatsu no Seiyaku

[WN]

vol.5

by Umetane

[Novel Updates](#)

Translator:

[Shikkaku Translations](#)

[Asian Hobbyist](#)

Epub: [Trollo WN/LN EPUB](#)

## Illustrations





# Character



【復讐者】  
江野宮雄一郎



【道具使い】  
工藤燐





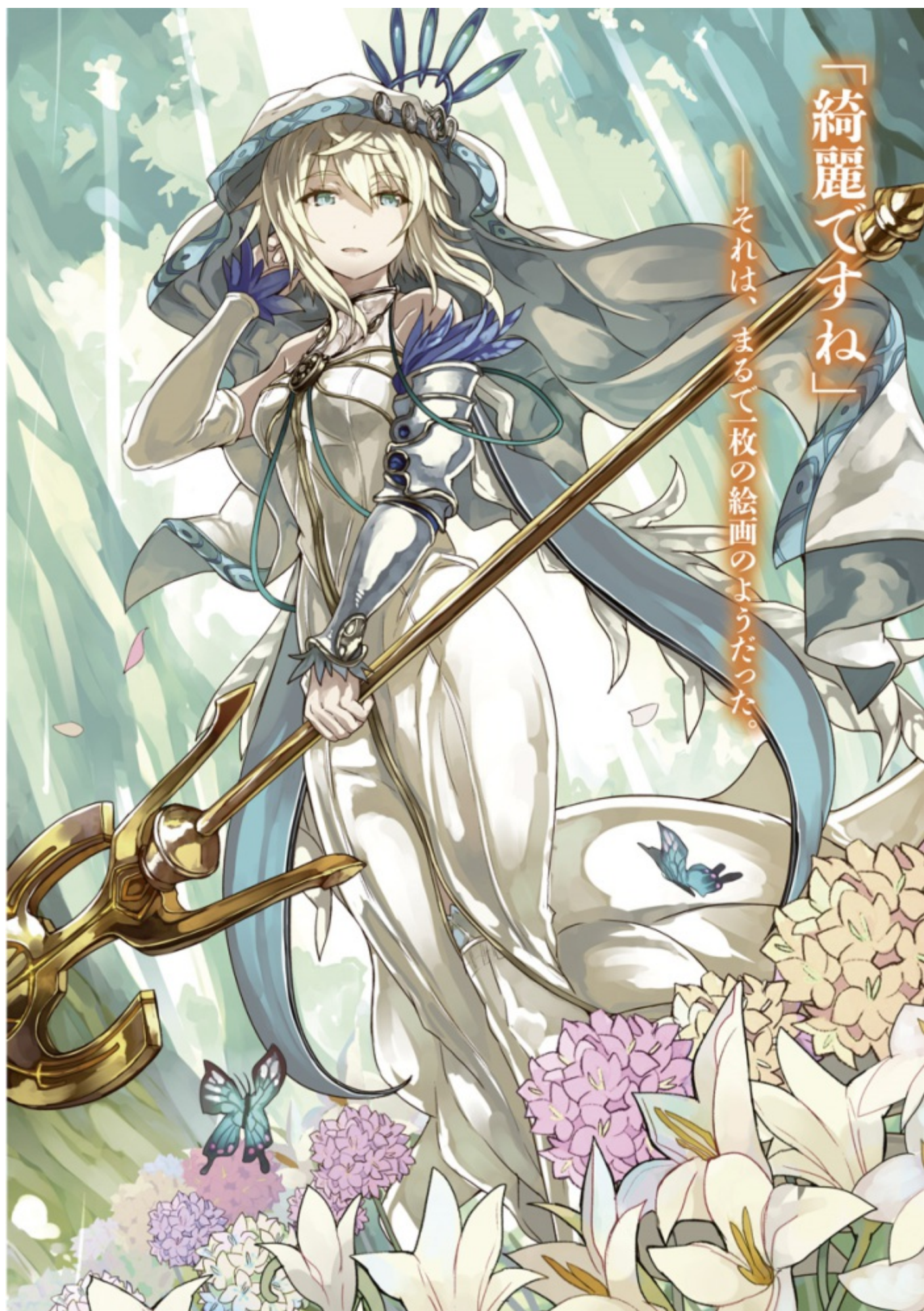
Kamigoroshinoeiyu  
and  
Ermenhilde





「綺麗ですね」

——それは、まるで一枚の絵画のようだった。







# 神殺しの英雄と 七つの誓約

Kamigoroshi no Eiyuu to Yatsu no Chikai

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5

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イラスト●柴乃權人





















# 【復讐者】江野宮雄一郎

女神から授かったチート：

『邪魔をする全てを捻じ伏せる力』



*Enomiya Yuichiro*

十三人の英雄の一人。優しい性格であるため非情になりきれず、魔神との戦いの際に左腕と恋人を失った過去を持つ。戦闘時には失くした左腕の代わりに、影の腕を生やして攻撃を繰り出す。現在は王都で亡くなった元恋人の墓守をしつつ、新たな恋人と幸せで甘い日々を過ごしている。





## 【道具使い】<sup>クドウリン</sup>工藤 燐

女神から授かったチート：

『存在しないマジックアイテムを  
作製できる知識と技術』

*Kudo Rin*

十三人の英雄の一人。自分が興味のある  
事にのみ関心を示す、天才に似た変人。  
仲間には心底優しいが他人には非常に冷  
たい、両極端な性格。緊張感があまり無く、  
その瞬間その瞬間を目一杯楽しもうとする。

## 【魔物使い】<sup>ヒユウユイ</sup>緋勇 結衣

女神から授かったチート：

『自分を裏切らない友達をつくる力』

*Hiyu Yui*

十三人の英雄の一人であり、最年少。妖  
精のアナスタシア、亡霊騎士のナイト、レッ  
ドドラゴンのファフニールと契約している。  
先天性色素欠乏症のせいで苛められた過  
去があり、そのため人見知りで、初対面の  
人の前に立つ時は必ず知り合いの誰かの陰  
に隠れてしまう。



## 【戦闘狂の女王】 シェルファ



*Shelfer*

傲岸不遜だが美しい、気高き悪魔の王。力こそが正義であり、弱者は悪とみなす。しかし、「弱いヤツは強くなるから好き」という独自の価値観も有しており、弱さを受け入れながらも努力する蓮司に昔から強い執着を示している。実はとある約束が今の彼女の行動原理となっているのだが……それを知る者は唯一人、蓮司のみ。



## Chapter 58: The Journey for the Demon God's Revival

There was the fact that the tournament ended only a few days ago, but the guild was really active and lively today.

Due to most adventurers taking part or going to see the tournament, lots of requests had been accumulated as well. From subjugating monsters to gathering herbs, but the most popular right now was carriage escort missions.

The various nobles who had come to watch the tournaments had to return back to their lands and would often hire adventurers to escort them safely, and since the mood has been like this, the nobles have been pretty lax with their money as well. Basically, it was a chance for adventurers to earn. It had become normal for reward for escorting to be double than normal, and there was even a chance that you could get a good tip if you did your job well.

So, all the adventurers inside the guild were actively trying to get themselves a lucrative escort job right now.

“So, this will be the reward. Will it be enough?”

The man sitting opposite of me on the table showed an extremely extraordinary amount.

I gave a glance towards the receptionist without letting the man realize, only to see the receptionist giving a bow towards me with a troubled face. Looking at his face, rather than agreeing, I could only give a sigh.

Why did it become like this? Well, the reason is that after the tournament, my face became famous and now my name sold well basically. Before, only my name was known as the hero who killed a God but other than that all else was not known since I was living away secluded in some rural village but now I finally appeared in public, that too in a big event like the tournament. And considering the fact that I'm working as just an adventurer now was also known, there would obviously be one or two nobles who'd try hiring me.

Nobles are, to say simply, full of people who like to put on airs. [I once hired one of the Heroes etc etc.]. They probably want to brag like that.

True, that reward amount is fascinating and there is a part of me that wants to accept it but,

"I'm very sorry, but I have already taken another request."(renji)

Saying that, I refused him.

This was the third one already. The noble in front of me and the receptionist dropped their shoulders simultaneously at that.

It looks like this noble is quite well known within the guild so I was told to at least consider talking to him.

"Is that so.."(noble)

"If you want, should I introduce some strong adventurers to you?"(renji)



“No. It is more than enough that you were at least willing to listen to what I had to say.”

Saying that he left his seat and went away. At least he was a pretty polite person.

There are few whose attitude completely changes when they realize that I won't accept.....well, not that bad but it still becomes clear that they are not happy to have been refused like that.

[What a pain.]

“Seriously.”(renji)

Answering to Ermenhilde, I also stood up from my seat. Stretching my body a bit, my neck made a nice cracking sound.

“But still, Feirona and others sure are late.”(renji)

[They must have things to take care of as well. We're the unusual ones who have nothing to do and are freely moving around.]

“Well, I guess that's true.”

Up till now, it hasn't really been a problem that much but really it's difficult to meet someone when you don't have mobiles to contact someone.

Let's meet at the guild today. I had said that but we hadn't even decided on some specific time. It's very normal if he's busy in some other task as well.

Well, so that I can peacefully wait, I moved away to corner seat where I won't stand out much.

Today, unfortunately, the sky was cloudy and it won't be weird for the weather to go bad at any time. Judging by how cold its getting, it might snow in the afternoon.

Once, I really snow but I haven't really liked it much after coming to this world. It gets really cold, almost freezing, and causes lots of problems when you're travelling.

Even though the traffic of people near the capital is pretty high, it's not like there are cars running in and out 24/7. If the road freezes, the carriages will definitely meet an accident and it becomes to find dead wood to make campfires to warm yourself as well. Water becomes cold as ice and even inside the tent, it's always chilling.

While I was looking outside the window into the street, thinking of such things, I felt a gaze at me. I ignored it for a while but it looks like the person didn't intend to go away anytime soon.

[What happened?]

"Someone looking at me."



[Mu.....oh, looks like another noble.]

When I told that Ermenhilde, she told me who the owner of that gaze was.

At times like these, Ermenhilde is really useful. Since she doesn't have a physical body, she can look around freely, and nobody would know it. And above all, only I can hear her voice as well.

Hearing her answer, I gave a sigh again. Really, the title of a Hero is nothing but trouble. Honestly speaking, it's a pain to stand out like this all the time.

[Francesca and others are with them as well.]

“.....What?”

Hearing that, I also looked towards the direction where the gaze was coming from.

Just like Ermenhilde said, there, Ms Francesca was standing along with Mururu, Feirona, and even Solnea. And one more woman I didn't recognise.

I felt like I had seen that woman somewhere but I couldn't recall. Her lush honey coloured hair reached the tip of her shoulders and were tied back into a ponytail. Seeing as she was wearing a dress even inside the guild, she must be the noble Errmenhilde talked about. Wearing a fiery red dress in a stylish manner, her strong gaze also matched her dress. She was a woman 10/10 men would call a beauty. Her height was similar to Ms Francesca, in fact Mururu was only as tall as her chest portion. It really looked like Feirona was surrounded by 3 beautiful ladies. Sorry, but Mururu your height makes it impossible for you to

be counted.

While I was thinking of that, Feirona and others walked up towards me.

“You were too slow to notice.”

“I had noticed quite a while ago though.”(renji)

“But you didn’t react at all.”

“Because there was a presence I did not recognise. So I had Ermenhilde look instead.”

When I said that, Mururu spoke ‘I see’ in a small voice before moving to sit beside me. Getting silently urged, I stood up. Looking at the woman’s expression once more, her eyes were sharp and lips were tightly shut. A slight red tinge could be seen on her lips and a soft fragrance came to me, probably some kind of perfume. She must be the type who pays a lot of attention to her appearance.

Just looking at her would be pretty rude so I also straightened my posture, she was a noble after all.

Just when, I finally recalled where I had seen her. It was during the tournament. After Ms Francesca had lost, it was her gaze I had sensed while I was talking to Ms Francesca back then.

“During the tournament, did we perhaps meet?”(renji)



“——So you had noticed Renji Yamada-sama.”

“Of course. You see I am a bit sensitive to others’ gazes.”

“Oh how rude of me. I should have greeted you properly.”

“Renji-sama, are you two acquainted already?.....”(fran)

“No, we just passed by each other in the arena, that’s all.”(renji)

This is the first time I am talking to her after all. While feeling almost coldness seep through her sharp eyes, her unexpectedly cute voice made me a bit surprised a bit. This also a kind of a ‘gap’ charm I guess?

“Nice to meet you.....”

There I finally realized I haven’t even heard her name yet. It’d be weird to ask of her name so I instead looked towards Ms Francesca instead, as she noticed my gazed and panicked to quickly introduce us.

“This is Melentia Barton. She’s my sister, seven years older than me.”(fran)

“I am Melentia Barton, my younger sister has been in your care.”(mel)

As Ms Francesca introduced her, Melentia-san gave a bow.

Her every movement was polished and refined, it wasn't something one could master in a day or two. For someone who is supposed to be in her twenties, she looks pretty young. And she seems to have mastered the mannerisms of nobles at this age already as well. She must have been going out as a noble in public from quite the young age.

But, her strong gaze remained the same. She might not think too well of me maybe.

Maybe she's angry that I made her younger sister live the dangerous life of an adventurer or something? While thinking of such things, I gave a bow as well.

"So you were Francesca-dono's older sister. Though I did not know you, I still apologise for not having greeted you myself."(renji)

"No, you don't have to. In fact, I should apologise. It seems my younger sister has been troubling you for some time now."(mel)

"Oh, no such thing. In fact I had been saved many times by Francesca-dono during our journeys as well."

"Oh really? Even though the teachers at her academy used to say that she won't make much accomplishments as a magician."

"Accomplishments don't depend on talent, but on your own will, is what I believe."

Her gaze remained sharp as always but I sensed some gentleness in her voice as well. I guess, she herself doesn't think as lowly of Ms Francesca as she is



saying.

In fact, she might have even been worried for her for living the life of an adventurer. Well, it's pretty normal though. After all, an adventurer is a job where there's no certainty for even the next day.

"fufu, it seems you've met quite a great person, Francesca."(mel)

"Yes!"(fran)

Being flattered like that made me feel a bit itchy instead. Ms Francesca seemed to have liked hearing that as she spoke that with a wide smile.

When I averted my eyes, Mururu was making a confused face and Feirona was giving a slight smile. He must be laughing inside I'm sure. Solnea seemed to be uninterested as usual as she continued to calmly stare at me.

"I'm sorry to have not come up myself even though I had noticed you just now."(renji)

"No no, in fact, it was impolite of me to have stared like that at the man who has been taking care of my sister."(mel)

"Please don't mind it. I believe that any would consider it an honour to be stared at by a beautiful lady such as yourself."

[Oi!]

“Oh you’re good at flattery!”

Ermenhile made a retort in between but Melentia-san simply nodded without being perturbed at all. Her expression showed not even slight surprise and just gave a light smile. Rather than saying she was used to it, it seemed like she understood that it was nothing more than just lip service. It showed that she was that used to such kind of conversations.

“There’s no use standing as we talk, please take a seat.”(renji)

“Yes, if I may then, please excuse me.”(mel)

When I said that, everyone sat down completely surrounding the table. Only Melentia-san and Solnea were still standing. Melentia-san must be hoping to sit down last as a way to be polite but Solnea wouldn’t understand that. Maybe she’s still confused from our conversation.

“Solnea, you can sit as well.”(renji)

“Okay.”(sol)

When I said that, Solnea sat down. And after that, Melentia-san sat down at last.

“First I apologise to have come and met you in such a way by using my sister.”(mel)

“No need to. It did surprise me but since I have been along with Francesca-



dono, I have been thinking of greeting you once as well.”(renji)

“Eh?”

“I let your precious sister be in the face of danger so many times. I have been thinking of apologising for that.”

“But that was my——”(fran)

Saying til that, Ms Francesca stopped her mouth. Feirona beside him seemed to have stopped her as he seemed to be still smiling a bit. I guess he understands that I’m saying things that I don’t really mean.

No, I did in fact think of giving an apology if we ever met though. Yeah.

“So, what business might you have with me?”(renji)

“Yes. Since the tournament is finally over, and as thanks for taking care of my sister as well, if possible I was hoping to invite you to our residence.”(mel)

“Oh my, how polite of you to do so.”(renji)

Her sharp gaze seemed to have slightly softened up a bit. Looks like it was she really does plan on inviting me. I guess I don’t have to worry about her getting angry for putting Ms Francesca in danger. Well, her gaze is still quite sharp so I can’t really let my guard down.

[Renji, I think you understand but.....]

But the problem is that I have the request from the Goddess as well. To lead Solnea to the throne of the Demon God. And to thus silence the monsters.

Though I haven't really been given a time limit, since the case itself is so important, I want to finish it as fast as possible myself. I need to go through Elfheim and towards Abenelm. Since I'll have to go by a ship, I don't even know how many days it'd take so that's also troublesome.

"I am happy for the invitation but."(renji)

"Do you perhaps have some other plans?"(mel)

"I took a request just a while ago. I will soon have to leave for the Commercial City Merdior."

Merdior. It's the only port City that has a sea route connecting Elfheim to Imnesia. It's also considered the most flourishing city in Imnesia as well.

I'll have to hire a ship there and then head for the Elfheim continent. I did consider asking Yui-chan to lend me Fafnir's ability to fly there but had to abandon them due to certain circumstances.

In the end, I am one the 13 heroes who saved the world. No matter how much I want to deny it, if everyone else thinks that way, my opinion won't matter anymore.



And now I, am trying to revive the Demon God who is the enemy of the whole world. Even if it is to support the life of the world itself, even if that Demon God is a completely different one than before, it still won't look great to the public for a hero to revive the Demon God. In the worst case, not just me, the rest of the 13 might have get harmed in the process as well. When I thought of that, I didn't feel like getting the help from anyone else and figured it'd be necessary to move alone.

I might be over thinking this but this world, whether for better or worse, is just too pure. The revere the Goddess and treat her as absolute. That Goddess did say to revive the Demon God herself but anyone who says that might be considered as a liar instead, or so Utano-san thinks. That's how much deeply rooted the fear of the Demon God is in the people of this world. It's so deep that there's no way it could be removed in just one year.

The emotions of people, I who hasn't studied something like psychology, cannot really understand. But—I can somewhat understand the hatred and fear of the Demon God. It's been only three years since I came to this world, and have spent only two years dealing with the Demon God yet my feelings are complex on the matter. To the people who have been living in this world from birth, their feelings in this matter would be even more complicated.

Thus, so as to not stand out a lot, I decided to use Fafnir only to go from Elfheim to Abenelm—to the throne of the Demon God in the God's castle.

“Are you in a rush?”(mel)

“Yes. I need to hire a ship as well you see so I need to hurry.”(renji)

“Then, why don't you hire our ship instead?”

[What?]

Ermenhilde spoke instead of me but of course, Melentia-san didn't hear her.

"Is something the matter?"

So, she looked confusedly at us who went silent for a while.

Her action made her look a bit childish making me once again realize that she was Ms Francesca's older sister indeed.

"It's nothing, so can you prepare a ship?"(renji)

"Yes. Ours is a mercantile house which functions majorly in Merdior after all. One ship could be prepared in a matter of days."

Hearing till that, I looked towards Ms Francesca. She realized that hadn't talked about her own house to me at all so she made a troubled face.

That said, I recalled that I hadn't asked much about it either. No, it's because she didn't seem to be much used to the noble's mannerisms so I didn't ask her much. To think that her house was a mercantile house.....

I recalled her reaction on seeing the Mithril sword for the first time. I guess she must have gotten a good eye on judging items while working at her house.

“That will, definitely be of help but.....”(renji)

“If, you’re thinking that it might be troubling us, then please don’t. To lend a ship to a Hero will earn us much more trust than any amount of money ever could.”

Well, I guess that’s true.

I don’t really specialise in business but I know that it depends on the trust and relationship between the customers and the merchants. Even in our own world, business constantly sue famous personalities in CMs/Ads which is to gain the trust of the public. Then, if someone who was completely unaware of anything was told that they lent a ship to a Hero once, their whole house will get the mark that their house is [ trusted by a Hero]. And not just that, it actually might have more benefits than I could think of.

I won’t go as far as to say that this was Give and take but if they are gaining something from it, I don’t have a reason to refuse either. It’s quite the trouble to prepare a ship and in fact I’m not even sure how much it costs to hire a ship right now. Then, best to go the specialists themselves. I’ll be relieved if someone who knew what they were doing would prepare the ship as well. Considering its Ms Francesca’s family, I’ll be relaxed as well.

“Give me some time to think about it.”(renji)

But instantly agreeing would be showing your own weakness here so I decided to gain some space and time. In fact, I do intend to leave only after a few days anyway. There’s no reason to give a quick reply.



“I understand. I plan to leave the capital after three days. Please be sure to decide by that time.”(mel)

“I’m sorry for the trouble.”(renji)

“It’s fine. Since you are so famous, I believe it’s not easy for you to move around easily as well.”

It seems she understood that as she didn’t even give some kind of warning either. Or maybe she knew I’d say something like that.

“Well then, I’ll take my leave now. Thank you for lending me some of your precious time.”(mel)

And giving a bow, Melentia-san left the place. At first she was making quite a grim face but by the end, her face had become quite gentle.

Did she actually come to trust me a bit or was that an act as well. Merchant house—as someone who deals with money, it’s difficult to read what they’re truly thinking. I guess that’s the same in every world.

“Fuuh.”(renji)

“I’m very sorry Renji-sama. To have brought my sister to you so suddenly.....”(fran)

“Nah, it’s fine. I did consider talking to them if I had the chance to meet after all.”

I mean it.

I did expose her sister to danger after all. Even if its what she herself wished for, it should be my job to contact her family first. As the one who taught—showed her how to fight.

But oh well, it's already been decided what to do about Melentia-san. Don't have to think much about it now. Thinking that, I looked towards Feirona.

“So do you guys have any plan on what you're doing next?”(renji)

“If you're asking that means you have something in mind as well?”(elf)

“.....It's good that you're so sharp.”

“What do you mean?”(mururu)

When I said that, Feirona simply gave knowing shrug implying he understood. Mururu didn't really get it so she asked again but the details are the same as what I said before.

Once more, we'll leave on a journey. And I am thinking of inviting Feirona and the others on it as well.

After having completed many requests together, I think I know their abilities and personalities. And I consider them as trustworthy.

“Like I said before, my next destination is beyond the ocean.”(renji)

“Meaning?”

“Elfreim continent. I am heading there. If you guys don’t have any other plans, Feirona and Mururu, I am hoping to hire you guys to go with me.”

When I said that, Mururu’s eyes slightly opened wider.

“Renji wants to hire me?”(mururu)

“Both you and Feirona to be exact.”

“.....What about Fran?”

She spoke that with a somewhat worried voice while looking towards Ms Francesca. She also felt a bit sad but maybe it was just my imagination.

“Ms Francesca has her school. And, the next journey will be.....quite dangerous.”(renji)

“That is, I am still too weak?”(fran)

“Or rather, the journey will be long. It could be that we might become unable to come back to this continent for a whole year.”



If that happens, it'd be problematic for her as a student. Especially Ms Francesca is a third year. She will graduate this year. It would end up affecting her graduation if she came.

Thinking of that, I really could not consider taking her with us. It seems Ms Francesca also understood that as when I told her that it'll be long, she gave a complex yet relieved sigh.

I don't consider her to be a burden. In the past few months, we travelled together a lot. Her ability, personality, I know pretty well. As she is now, Ms Francesca can be considered a competent adventurer.

"That's quite the long journey you're talking about."(elf)

"Yeah. The client for the job is quite a troublesome one you see."(renji)

"Who?"

"That, I'll tell you if decide to accept the job."

As expected I can't just lightly say that it's a request from Astraera herself. Not to mention there's quite a lot of eyes and ears here. Who knows where the objective of this journey or that its from Astraera might leak.

Well, if I had to tell them it'll be after we depart out of even Merdiore.

[Though it might be long, depending on the situation, it can be completed pretty soon as well though.]

“fumu.”

[But, it will be a dangerous journey. Consider it a proof of trust in your abilities that you’re invited to take this request as well.]

“Don’t say useless things, idiot.”(renji)

[Who are you calling an idiot?]

“As usual you two sure get along well.”(elf)

While giving a wry smile at our conversation, Feirona rested his chin on his fingers and went into thought. Mururu was.....not thinking much from the looks of it. Maybe she’s planning to decide based on Feirona’s decision.

“So, Renji-sama, till Merdiore.....”(fran)

“Yeah. Even without the matter about the ship, I still plan on heading towards Merdiore. Let’s go till there together, okay?”(renji)

“Yes!”

When I said that, Ms Francesca nodded with a wide smile.

Thinking that soon I’ll have to say goodbye to this smile as well, an unexplainable feeling rose in me.

“Renji.”

When, a calm voice called towards me.

Looking that way, as usual without any emotion, Solnea was looking at me.

“What should I do?”

“What do you want to do?”(renji)

I answered her question with another question.

Until now I have been telling her to do this and that but from here onwards I want to hear her own will as well. Even if there’s nothing there right now.

Astraera said so. To lead Solnea, a different Demon God than Nayfell, a Demon God that dislikes fighting to the throne of Gods.

I still am not sure how that’ll work. But, I know I can’t continue like this. Right now, Solnea is no different than a puppet who does whatever she’s asked of. That’s because she was born just now and doesn’t hold any will of her own.

That also explains why Solnea doesn’t have any memories as well. I believe that a personality is formed from your countless experiences. Since she has none of those, her will is so weak.



Then what I can do is show her the world. The world of humans, the world of demihumans and beastmen. And show her just how pretty and fun place this world is.

Nayfell wished for strife and conflict, he was god who could only exist and feel emotions while fighting. Just like how Astraera enjoys looking at the lives of people, Zwenelia likes to sleep in peace, Nayfell enjoyed being feared, and hated.....and along with those feelings, he wished to fight the ones who come at him.

I'm sure he never knew what Orc meat tasted like or what a stew's warmth feels like or what a juice made out of fresh fruits tastes like.

Then I want to teach all of that to Solnea. The lives of the people, the beauty of this world, the fun of talking with your friends and comrades. Just like how Eru, who was born as a weapon, changed, Solnea, who was born as a Demon god, would change as well.....I believe so. I might be too naïve but that's all I have. I may be laughed at——but, that's all I have.

“I don't know.”(sol)

To my question, Solnea, as expected.....without showing any wave of emotions, said that.

## Chapter 59: Start of the Journey ①

Opening a very typical looking wooden treasure box inside the treasury, I found the full set of a very familiar equipment.

Inside the room full of items that didn't have much practical use, like armour, swords, robes and other such items decorated with ornaments, that chest really looked old. That also made it stand out the least inside the whole treasury.

It's not a place where thieves could enter anyway but still, I examined the equipment kept purposely in a way that it wouldn't stand out. A set of clothes and a mantle, along with leather gloves and boots. The clothes, though also made out of leather, felt very soft and there was also a belt to tighten the clothes to perfectly fit the body. There was also a holster for throwing daggers along with the daggers themselves that had been created with such a magic that they'll definitely hit the target once thrown. And also a knife I can use when not using Ermenhilde. This one was made out of a dragon's fang, it was only a lower rank dragon though. The mantle had the protection of wind spirit Sylph and also had an effect that lessens the impact when falling from tall places. Near the chest portion of the mantle was an ornament crafted by an elf. This small ornament also held magical energy that lightens the weight of the equipment I was carrying.

All of it looks pretty similar to what I usually wear now but its in a completely different level in terms of defensive ability. After all, these were created by Kudou using the raw materials obtained from top class monsters and demons of Abenelm. Defeating just one of those would take tens of adventurers to fight together, that's how fearsome each and every one of those monsters were. These aren't available normally in the market, and the set is a custom made one solely for my use. Not just in terms of defensive ability, but even in terms of

magical defense, and against breath attacks of dragons and demonic beasts, it is able to withstand it, even if only a bit. With just this alone, one's survival rate would get higher by a lot.

"Oh, found it."

[Finally, eh?]

As I brought it out, it was very light. It felt a bit dusty, probably because I hadn't used it in a long while. But for something I hadn't even touched for a whole year, it's still in pretty good shape. It looks like they made sure that nothing gets damaged.

"Did you find yours already?"

"Yeah, what about you?"(renji)

"Not yet, still looking."

While I was thinking of first drying the clothes a bit after leaving here, a voice called towards me from the other side of the treasury.

That voice came from the other side of all the armour sets lying in here. Holding my clothes, as I walked towards there, with a nice shaped butt facing towards me, Utano-san was bending over looking for items that will be of use during a journey. To avoid any intruders inside there were no windows here so under the faint light of the magic lamp, I could see her butt swaying. And since she wore a tight dress, I could even notice every slight movement as well. If I had to say even further, the line of her underwear slightly visible over her dress



made it even more seductive.

So as to not lose to temptation, I averted my gaze to look and touch at the various armour sets that would be useless in an actual battlefield. They seemed pretty well maintained as not a single speck of dust came on to my fingers. Well, I guess its normal for the treasury to always be well maintained. Probably.

Inside my head, I calmly analysed the various armours kept here.

[What happened, Renji?]

“Nah, just thinking that this armour would really sell for a lot.”

[I guess. It has a lot of decorations but has no magical properties attached and also looks pretty heavy though.]

“Well, it’s only courtesy-use armour so this is fine.”(utano)

Without looking towards me, she talked with her butt still facing me. No, but, really Utano-san. Since she was probably looking for something kept deep inside, her butt was moving left and right a lot.

If Ermenhilde wasn’t here with me, what would I have done? Is this because I worked too hard in the past few days? I have been really conscious of Utano-san these past few days. Or rather, Utano-san has been a bit too defenceless. But it’s normal for me as a man to feel like this while being alone in a dark place with a woman right? Well, Ermenhilde is also with me though.

Back then, she was more wary and showed less openings. Or maybe she's tempting me knowingly?

No, that's not possible since Ermenhilde is with me. But that means Utano-san really has grown a bit more relaxed. Well this is like an interval between one big event and another. In the end she's also just a human. Even if she can use super powerful magic, she can't be cautious of her surroundings all day and night. It's important to relax your nerves like this once in a while, she knows this as well. Then it means she's simply just relaxed right now. It's quite complicated as a man but it also felt good to see that I am trusted that much by her.

"If you need anything else as well, you can take it you know? King Joshua has given full permission after all." (utano)

"Even if say that..."

My next journey. Since it'd be difficult to gain support from the country for such a cause, we were told that we could at least use the treasury and its items freely. On Imnesia we can still pass through with money but the concept of money itself doesn't exist on Elfreim. So Utano-san has been choosing various items and ornaments that could be used for barter. I can differentiate between what's practical to use and what's not but when it's comes to accessories and ornamental items, I have no idea what's good or bad. At most I can tell what would suit who. And barely make out if something is fake. And even that'll be tough if I have not seen the actual items many times already. I honed that skill desperately in my previous journey. After all before that, I was so useless in that sense that it was almost a burden.

While I looked around the surroundings, I could only think about how all these weapons were so impractical. Since I don't possess magical energy as

well, even when I know an item has a magical protection, it's still useless to me. My constitution really is inconvenient.

Holding up a small engraved ring, I played with it twirling it around between my fingers. Shining the light of the lamp on it, I saw that it was engraved with Elven letters. And going by what's written, it will enhance the physical abilities of the wearer slightly.

"fumu."

[Thinking of gifting it to someone?]

"That might be a nice idea."

Rather than saying gift it, it's more like having them use it. If its Feirona or Ms Francesca, they should be able to use it. Mururu's arm/hand size changes when she fights so rings would only be in the way. Now that I think about it, I had not yet given her any present to congratulate her performance in the tournament so I'll give this to her.

I thought that but then again, I felt like if its to congratulate her, it might be nicer to prepare something myself. Randomly handing over an item from the treasury lacks any emotion after all. In either case, I put the ring inside my pocket and looked for other things.

[What's that to the right? Is that a potion?]

"Hmm?"

Looking towards where she told, I saw chemical like substances kept there of various colours. Shining the lamp on one them, the faint light passed through it. On its label, a difficult to pronounce name was written. Looking at the backside, the contents were written. Looks like it's a strong paralysis drug.

You can't call it a potion but I wonder if it could be of use somewhere. But using poisons is a pretty difficult task on its own so I decided to return it back to where I picked it from. And I picked the bottle next to it. As expected, this one had a difficult to pronounce name as well. But this one was quite less in quantity compared to the other one. Even though that one was filled to the brim, this one's only slightly less than half full.

[What's that?]

"Let me check."

This is.....looking at the back, numerous names of herbs were written and it was labelled as a stimulant. It's less quantity, and the fact this was a stimulant, hmm, could this be...

[Is it a potion?]

"No, this isn't it."

[Then, it's useless.]

It is useless, but it kind of makes me curious. Seems really interesting after all.

Looking for more similar things, I picked the next bottle.

“So..”

Just when I was about to check its contents, suddenly Utano-san spoke up. Like before, with her butt still towards me. I ended up putting the two containers inside my pocket. No, it was purely by reflex, really. I do think I shouldn't have done that though. I'll reflect on it.....probably.

“I heard the destination of your journey but still, how long do you think would take till you can return?”(utano)

“Who knows. Maybe half a year, or one full year.....”

It could be longer, but it could be shorter as well.

“I really can't tell.”(renji)

“I see.”

When I said that honestly, she answered with an even flatter voice than usual.

“hm.....well, this should do.”(utano)

While I was wondering if she got angry due to seeing my lack of any plan, Utano-san stood back up straight and took a breath. In her hands was a light looking bag filled with items.



“With this much, you should be fine for a while.”(utano)

“Yeah, thanks.”

[Thanks, Yuuko.]

“Oh now that’s rare, for you to thank me so honestly.”(utano)

“Really?”

“Normally you’d say something to the contrary, and be uncooperative.”

“And here I thought I had always been giving my thanks properly though.....”

Have I always spoken in that way to her? I know when I’m just teasing her but, when thanking—I am sure I did it properly. While I stood there lost for words, she must have found my reaction amusing as she gave a giggle while hiding her mouth.

“I’m just kidding. You do say ‘thank you’ when you need to.”(utano)

“Thank goodness. I’d feel bad for you if I had not been thanking you properly after all.”

“In only that sense, you’re pretty serious aren’t you?”

“.....what do you mean ‘only that’?”

[Umu.]

You’re taking Utano-san’s side as well, Ermenhilde? While feeling a bit sad, I took the bag from her hands. Even though it fit right in my palms, the bag was actually pretty heavy.

Was my sad face amusing as Utano-san rested her back on the shelves she had been searching just now and looked at me gently. The fact that her eyes still looked pretty sharp, I probably shouldn’t say that.

“You will return properly this time, right?”(utano)

“Of course. I will.....I haven’t paid back your debt anyway.”

“That’s true. Don’t you forget to properly pay me back okay?”

“I’m not that dishonourable I think.”

“Yes.....I know that, very well.”

And this time, with a smile that anyone could tell that it was a proper smile, she looked at me.

“But, back to the problem at hand. That girl called Solnea, how are you planning on turning her into the Demon God?”(utano)

“Well. I was told to lead her to the throne of Gods but I’m not sure where exactly that is. So for now, I plan on taking her to the place where I killed Nayfell.”

“I see. Looks like it’ll be a harsh journey.”

“Not really. I have been there once after all. My prior knowledge should come in handy.”

The ecology and specialities of the monsters living in Abenelm and places where Demons gather, and the whole topography as well. If I were to use all that info properly, I alone should be able to make my way to the Demon God’s castle as well.

“I trust you on that. All said and done, somehow you are the one who has the highest survival abilities out of all of us after all.”(utano)

“Really?”

“You and Hiiragi-kun both. Only you two can make food out of monsters, and can also tell between all types of herbs and wild grasses.”

“Not all of them.”

“But, you can tell which are edible right? That alone is pretty amazing in my opinion.”

“If we’re talking about such things, then can’t you read even ancient elven and dwarven letters? You can even hear the voices of the spirits as well.”

That seems more useful while travelling to me though. Well, if I said that we’ll start talking around in circle though. So, as normal, I praised her as well before ending the conversation.

[So Renji, do you have some kind of proper idea?]

“hm?”

[To make Solnea into a Demon God that hates fighting, that is.]

“Well, by showing her the daily lives of people, treating her to tasty food, showing her beautiful scenery.....”

[Can all that alone make one like people?]

“I think so.”

Ermenhilde spoke in a fed up tone but I ended up laughing at that. Giving a glance, I saw even utano-san hiding her mouth.

“I know a God who came to like humans like that after all.”(renji)

[Astraera-sama, eh?]

“Hmm, who knows.”

That one, only needed tasty food to turn like that though.

But, while feeling amused at Ermenhilde, I felt slightly sad at the same time. Eru’s memories will not return. No, because Eru and Ermenhilde are completely different existences in the first place, I should say that Eru now only exists within our memories.

But still, that sadness was only slightly there. I didn’t sigh like before. While laughing, I only felt a small stabbing pain inside.

And soon enough, I will stop feeling even that small pain as well.

At that time, I’m sure, I will definitely cry.

[What’s wrong, Renji?]

“hm?”

“You were in a daze. Are you tired perhaps?”(utano)

“Not really. I was just thinking of the Goddess that humans all love.”

[Hm?]

“.....I see.”(utano)



Ermenhilde made a confused sound but Utano-san instantly understood my thoughts from just that.

Eru's death. The only ones who know about it are me, Utano-san and Koutarou who I'll meet in Elfheim. If I don't tell that to anyone ever, I'm sure these two will keep it a secret as well. But then, the girl called Eru will.....will the Goddess' death will only be known and then forgotten among us three? (T/N: Just reminding, and from what I have understood, that Eru was born by dividing original Astraera's energy. So the current Astraera is only the other remaining half of the original Astraera while the other half (Eru) is dead. Which is why Renji in the last chapter called Astraera as only one part of her I guess. So I guess in a way, the original Goddess is also dead since Eru (who was a one part of the original) is dead?)

When I thought of that, once more I felt a stabbing pain in my chest.

"After this journey is over, there is something I need to tell you as well."(renji)

[To me?]

"yeah."

[fumu. I don't expect much but let's just say that I'll be waiting for it.]

"So are you looking forward to it or are you not? Which is it?"

[Whenever you say something like that, you tease me as well so I don't expect

much.....but I am looking forward to it as well.]

“So basically, you enjoy getting teased by me?”

[No! Not teasing—-but I do enjoy talking to you.]

“Fuh.....you are really are a weird one.”

[I can't help it. I'm you part—.....weapon after all.]

You, were about to say 'partner', weren't you? She seems to have realized it as well as the atmosphere became a bit awkward.

“I get that you two get along well but don't just forget me and get lost in a world with just you two there, okay?”(utano)

“No, no, we don't get along that well.”(renji)

[Muu]

When I said that giving a joking shrug, Ermenhilde made a displeased sound. But this is usual. Utano-san, walked towards us silently and with her pretty finger, touched my cheek.

“Un.”

Anyone would call her expression to be a smiling one but for some reason,

only to me, it felt like she was crying.

To change the mood, I took a breath and spoke in a much livelier voice.

“This should be enough for now, after all we’ll be going to Merdior on a carriage.”(renji)

“You sure?”

“Well, I might find some interesting things so I’ll do the rest of the shopping there.”

“Then, let’s leave this place shall we?”

Saying that Utano-san left the treasury. Chasing her footsteps, I also left the place. The door to the place was a simple wooden one but two soldiers were permanently on guard at the doors.

Those soldiers saluted us as we left.

“So, you think you can wear those?”(utano)

“It’s a bit dusty.”(renji)

“Then, let’s get a place and wash them properly first.”

“At the same time, might as well bask it in the sun as well.”

“Sounds great.”

No, I was just kidding though.

But with just that, I felt like Utano-san’s footsteps became slightly lighter. Her eyes are still the sharp as usual but she was playing around with her long hair, twirling it between her fingers. That’s her habit whenever she’s in a good mood.

Even though her expression was same, the fact that I was able to tell her mood from just a small habit like that was proof that we have really travelled together a lot. Realizing my gaze, Utano-san gave a puzzled look at me.

“You seem to be in a good mood.”(renji)

“.....Not really.”

But still, she continued to play with her hair. The fact that she herself wasn’t aware of this habit made it even lovelier. Should I tell her that?

What kind of fool would do that, I wonder?

The place we were heading to was something like a back garden. The place where maids usually do stuff like laundry. I’m sure nobody would have a problem if I dried my equipment there. Since the sun is high right now as well, it’s the perfect time to bask the clothes in the sun.

Even later, many soldiers and knights, nobles passed by us as we headed towards this rear garden. There was already a person there before us as well, and it was not a maid washing some clothes.

It was a woman with long silver hair wearing lightly decorated white dress —King Joshua's only daughter, Princess Amalda Imnesia, was sitting on a bench relaxing. She didn't have her usual dignified expression that I normally saw during the tournament, instead, she was simply in thought while making a warm and comfortable expression, looking far away. As I was looking at her thinking about her atmosphere was different than usual, she realized our presence and turned towards us.

"Ara?"( amalda)

"Well if it isn't Princess Amalda——"(utano)

"Fufu. No need for that formal tone, no one else is here right now."

"Fine."(utano)

"Eh?"(renji)

She changed her way of talking so easily?

What is this? In the time I wasn't here, did these two get closer to each other?

Back then, they were more strained, or rather, Princess Amalda always seemed scared of Utano-san. Well with that gaze and way of talking, anyone



would get scared of Utano-san. But still, really, a lot can happen in one year. I think maybe this is somewhat like what Urashima Tarou felt like. (T/N:Google Urashima Taro to learn about his folk tale.)

While feeling a bit confused, I went along with Utano-san towards Princess Amalda.

“Princess, please excuse us as we work here for a while.”(utano)

“Sure?”

“Yamada-kun, give the coat first.”

Being told that I gave her my coat I was holding in my left hand as Utano-san, even though we were in front of the princess, began to dust off my clothes without paying any mind.

Really, is this okay? It’s kind of rude, or rather, it’s making me feel a bit nervous. Thinking that I looked towards Amalda but she was looking at Utano-san as if she was doing something incredibly fun.

“That looks like fun. May I help as well?”(amalda)

“.....Eh?”(renji)

“Sure, I don’t mind. Yamada-kun, give the trousers next.”(utano)

Ehhh..... I looked at Utano-san to confirm once more but she didn't even look at me as she was busy with dusting off my coat.

Like really, is this okay? While thinking that, I gave Princess Amalda the trousers as told. As I did, with a smile, the princess started flapping and dusting off the trousers along with Utano-san. Her slender arms seemed to lack strength making it look really dangerous. While I continued to look over Princess as she worked, I handed over my mantle to Utano-san next as told.

After they had finally dusted off my boots and leather gloves as well, both the women sat down on the bench together while panting slightly. Well, the princess aside, why does Utano-san have such low stamina as well?

“What?”(utano)

“You haven't been exercising much recently?”(Renji)

“.....I specialise more in desk work, that's all.”

[So, she says.]

She always said that didn't she. While thinking of that, I spread my throwing daggers and Knife on the ground. Taking it out of the sheathe, I confirmed the condition of every blade by putting it against the sunlight.

They are all in perfectly usable condition. Throwing one of the daggers, it flew a bit before stabbing into the ground.

“Return.”(renji)

The moment I muttered that, that dagger returned back to my hand. There were 7 of such daggers. I tested each and every one of them properly one by one.

“Such an interesting blade.”(amalda)

“Well, an elf made these after all.”

Saying that, next I swung around the knife acrobatically to test its condition. This one, seemed to be fine as well. As weapons I will be depending on against the monsters and demons of Abenlem, they are trustworthy indeed.

When I finished, I heard a small applause. Looking that way, it was princess Amalda.

“For showing me something really interesting.”(amalda)

“No, no. this isn’t anything special at all.”(renji)

I put the knife back in its sheathe. Ermenhilde remained silent probably because she still in a bad mood. It was when I used the mithril sword as well but as expected, Ermenhilde doesn’t like it when I use any other weapons. While smiling wryly at my partner’s lovely temper, I slowly cleaned off the dirt that stuck to each of the daggers.

“So, you two seem to have gotten pretty close.”(renji)

“I don’t quite understand what you mean, Renji-sama?”

“No, I’m just surprised. That Utano-san actually has a friend she really gets along with that’s all.....”

“You’re implying that I don’t have friends, is that it?”(utano)

“No way, just your imagination.”(renji)

When I gave a shrug, she gave a clear sigh. Since I was on the ground and she was on the bench, it ended up with me getting glared down at by her with cold eyes.

And the fact that I didn’t really mind it was proof that there was definitely something wrong with me as well.

“Haah. So princess, why are you here?”(utano)

“Just, wanted some time to think.”

“Something to think about?”

“Yes.”

I wonder what it was. While wiping of the third dagger, I continued listening to their conversation.

“I have thought of this before as well but.....”(amalda)

“Hm?”

“Yuuta-sama is a bit too kind, I feel like.”

.....umu. Even though she said that with such a serious atmosphere, why is that I almost dropped my dagger in reflex?

“Let me ask this first and foremost.”(renji)

“Ah, what is it, Renji-sama?”(amalda)

“This conversation, is it fine for me to hear it?”

“I don’t mind. In fact as a man, I would like to hear your opinion on this as well.”

“Yamada-kun’s opinion?.....i wonder if that would even be of any use.”(utano)

[What are you talking about?]

“Something you don’t really have to worry about.”(renji)



[Why? I want to hear it as well.]

Why is my partner so curious in only such weird things?

“So, what did you hope to ask about Kuuki?”(renji)

“There’s no one here right now. You don’t have to speak so formally, Renji-sama.”(amalda)

“Haah.”

Looking towards Utano-san, she shook her head as well. Looks like she must have been forcibly changed like this as well.

“So, what did that Kuuki do?”(renji)

“No, in fact, it’s that he doesn’t do anything.....even last night.”(amalda)

Oh no. I don’t want to hear such things from a girl’s mouth. Was it because I still had an ideal fantasy image of a girl in my head? Well, Princess Amalda is 18 now and Utano-san is 28 this year. Neither could really be called a girl anymore

— —

“What?”(utano)

“Nothing.”(renji)

I think, humans can die just by being glared at. How many times have I thought that after coming to this world. As I turned my gaze down to the dagger in my hand without letting anyone realize, I felt like timid herbivore animal.

“So, what happened last night?”

“So last night, I visited his bedroom but.....”

So that guy’s a late bloomer as well, or rather a more passive kind of guy eh? It’s amazing how he was able to control himself even when a beauty like Princess Amalda came to his room.

“.....But I ended up falling asleep first.”(amalda)

“Wait what!?!”(renji)

“Eh?”

“Ah, sorry, it’s nothing please continue.”

Oh shit, this princess is an airhead.

Back then I thought of her as a girl who has lived an overprotected life but she turned out to be simply a natural airhead.

“But, he didn’t do anything to me even though I was sleeping.....”(amalda)

[But he did sleep beside you right?]

“Yes, of course but still.”

Kuuki, you’re actually amazing. I could only feel amazement at his self control powers. Or rather, really, is it fine to tell something like that to a man like me? I questioned for the Nth time, but still had no answer.

“Since this will be the first time for both you, I do think that it’d be better if both of you were properly conscious this time at least. It’ll be a precious memory as well after all.”(utano)

Somehow the way you spoke it made it sound really lewd, Utano-san.

Huh, I wonder why women are able to talk of such things so well? While feeling a bit timid, I put more strength in my arm cleaning the dagger.

“But that means I can’t tempt him, make him drunk, or look at him while sleeping?.....I’m starting to lose confidence.”(amalda)

“Princess.....”

[fumu.]

I, honestly, cannot hide my surprise of the fact that you are such carnivore. Even though her looks and atmosphere is that of a dignified lady, to think she’d be like that inside.....Women are really scary. And above all, she’s unaware of her own nature, or rather, everything she thinks of revolves around Kuuki.

Utano-san was giving me glances but I have no way of helping this.

I know Kuuki's personality. He really treasure the princess with all of his heart, I'm sure. And though that should make the princess feel happy as well, she also wants him to have a bit more desires, or rather, lust towards her.

.....I feel like my own thoughts aren't making much sense right now.

"By the way, are you always consulting such things with Utano-san?"(renji)

"Wait--"(utano)

"Yes. Yuuko-sama sometimes takes out time to listen to me."(amalda)

"About what kind of things exactly?"(renji)

"That is a secret. It is a bit embarrassing to tell that to a man."(amalda)

Really? After all you've already said? Could it be that the things she spoke of before like tempting and making him drunk be Utano-san's ideas? Maybe the princess flattered her saying that Utano-san was experienced so she should give her some guidance or something? I realized that I was smiling without even wanting to just thinking of that scene.

Did she discern what I was thinking, Utano-san was making a surprised expression. The fact that her gaze was going here and there must be because she was in a panic.

“So, Renji-sama, do you have some good advice for me?”(amalda)

“Well, I can’t think of anything but taking the route of frontal attack.”(renji)

“Frontal attack?”

“Invite him to dinner, drink together, create a good mood and then invite him to your bed. If it’s a guy like Kuuki, it’d have more effect than using weird tactics I believe.”

“But that didn’t work, I tried.”

“.....That incompetent fool.”

“I think Yuuta-kun would also say that, but Yamada-kun, you’re the last person in the world who has the right to say that.”(utano)

[Seriously.]

Ermenhilde, seriously, who’s ally are you?

While grieving from the harsh betrayal of my partner, I went into thought. Well, 50% of those thoughts were about tonight, thinking of vulgar things that might happen to Kuuki.

“Then, I may have a nice item for you.”(renji)

“I’m pretty sure that it’ll not be anything worthwhile.”(utano)

While acting like I didn’t hear utano-san’s remark, I put my hand into my pocket. It’s the stimulant drug I found in the treasury earlier. I was thinking of giving it to her, showing her the various ways to use it.....

But what I brought out was a container that was full to the brim. It wasn’t the stimulant, but the other one. The one whose contents even I hadn’t checked yet.

“What’s that?”(amalda)

“Where did you find something like that?”(utano)

“In the treasury.”(renji)

“While I was helping you, you were looking for such things?”(utano)

Utano-san’s gaze grew sharper.

“So, what is it?”(utano)

[What’s written, Renji?]

“Let’s see.....”

While putting my hand to shade against the sun, I checked the back of the



container. The faint red liquid was really beautiful. Lots of ingredients names were written, and in the end——there was an aphrodisiac.

“.....”

“What is the matter, Renji-sama?”

“Yamada-kun?”

Oh shit. This one's even more dangerous than just a stimulant. Just when I was about to return the container back inside my pocket, I wonder what she thought of as Utano-san snapped her fingers. And from just that, the container disappeared from my hands.

In a panic I looked around only to see the container in Utano-san's hands.

“.....”

“Yuuko-sama, what's wrong?”

This time, it was Utano-san's turn to go silent. As expected of the Sage. She knew what kind of aphrodisiac it was. She must have taken it from me thinking that I had just found something dangerous again but she probably didn't expect it to be an aphrodisiac. Of course, neither did I to be honest.

Right before my eyes, her cheeks slowly grew redder and redder. It's an expression she'd never show in front of others normally. Since normally she has a sour face, or rather, an atmosphere that isn't inviting to others, this change

seemed to have really surprised Princess Amalda as well.

While looking at the change in Utano-san, I felt, that today I really might die.

Who the hell put something like that inside the treasury??

[Just what's going on?]

“I don't understand either, Ermenhilde-sama.”(amalda)

While listening to their nonchalant voices, I brought out Ermenhilde from my pocket and threw it slightly away from me. As if she was waiting for it, Utano-san's fingers snapped.

Kuuki, I hope you fall in hell(read as heaven). While falling inside the depths of hell (read as pitfall), I thought that. I am happy she was at least kind enough to properly gather up my daggers inside the holster that had been lying on the ground.

Even though I am supposed to leave on life threatening journey soon.....we are the same as always.

I'll do something stupid, and then get punished. Just like we have always been.—I felt like I had returned back to that time once more. Inside the circle where my friends lived.

Well, even I think that having an aphrodisiac on me was a bit too much, even as a joke. Also, I'm really glad that none of the kids were here. Really.

## Chapter 60: Start of the Journey ②

The next morning. As I headed towards the north gate of the capital's walls, about 5 carriages and 10-something people were gathered there, loading up stuff inside the carriages.

Among those, around one more luxurious looking carriage, 4 soldiers, dressed in full armour like knights were standing. I don't know whether Melentia-san hired them or were they knights directly serving the Barton House but judging by the way they wore the armour and the cautious gaze they all had, they seemed to be quite skilled. That said I could only make a vague estimate of exactly how skilled they were.

While I was looking at one of such knights, Ms Francesca, who was standing between those 4 as if being protected by them, noticed me. And then, Melentia-san noticed me as well.

Since it'd be rude if I didn't go and greet them, I walked towards them. I am bad at being formal with others, but I can't avoid this either.

"Renji-sama, thank you very much for accompanying us today."(mel)

"No, I should be the one to thank you for going as far so to prepare horses for me as well."(renji)

"Oh, you don't have to. That said, I was hoping that you'd also ride inside the carriage with us....."

“That, I apologise, but I simply prefer riding on a horse.”

Saying that, I softly refused her offer. I don't really mind riding inside carriages, or rather, I really would love to properly spend some time with a beauty like Melentia-san. But, then again, it'd be too much for me to continue talking such formally during the whole journey. It's quite the regretful decision. I am not really hoping to get close to her personally but still, I want to make a good impression at least. All the more so, if she's such a beauty.

I believe that should be normal for any man to think like that.

But still, her tone and gaze sure have a distinct sharpness. It was like that the other day as well so I think that this might be her natural expression. Since her younger sister has a overly warm atmosphere around her, maybe it makes her sharpness stand out even more. Well, that's also charming in its own way.

“How unfortunate. I was very interested in having a chat with you.”(mel)

“It's an honour for you to say that but I don't really have many interesting things to talk about.”(renji)

“Oh, is that so? My sister's always telling me what an incredible man you——”

“O, Onee-sama!?!”(fran)

Oh well, just what did Ms Francesca tell about me to her? I'm a bit curious but it'd be difficult to ask that right here. There are too many people here after all.

Well, if I get the chance, I'll keep in mind to ask that.

"In fact, I even had difficulty coming to the capital alone. I was able to only thanks to your sister and my comrades."(renji)

"You're quite the modest man, aren't you?"(mel)

"Not really. It's true that I have been helped by your sister quite a lot. Enough that I could thank you for it."

When I gave such praise, Ms Francesca's face became more and more redder.

[Ahem.]

"Well then, please excuse me. My comrades are waiting for me that way as well. If something happens, please tell me unhesitatingly."(renji)

"Of course. Please wait for a while, we'll be done loading our baggage soon enough."(mel)

"Very well."

Yeah yeah, while wryly smiling to my partners cute interruption, I moved away from there. Ms Francesca's wide smile was quite impressive. Melentia-san was smiling elegantly as well.

[You're making a sloppy face.]

"I was born with this face."

[.....fuun.]

"I was just greeting her."

Giving a bitter laugh towards Ermenhilde who got angry, I slight caressed the medal inside my pocket. I doubt her mood will get better from just that but at least she would complain/scold less.

While finding her reactions to be lovely, I looked around the surroundings. I did say that my comrades were waiting for me but there was no truth to it. In fact, since I came here just now myself, I hadn't even checked to see if Feirona and others were here or not. Well, now that I said something like that, it'll be awkward to be seen moving about looking for them as well. So I searched with just my gaze, but thankfully I found the blonde elf and the white wolf beastwoman soon enough. They stand out quite a lot after all. On a bench near them, Solnea was also sitting there. They had already noticed me as they were looking towards me. As I began to walk towards them, their gazes looked like they became softer as well.

"Sorry, am I late?"(renji)

"Un."(mururu)

".....I didn't really see you guys when I came here though."



“Just your imagination.”

Don't lie so smoothly. Giving a smile at that cute lie, I felt a bit relaxed as well. AS expected, I feel more comfortable near my trusted comrades.

It's not like I don't trust the nearby other adventurers but I end up creating a wall, or rather, I maintain some distance with them unknowingly, maybe because I have been living as an adventurer for too long?

“Did something happen?”

“hm?”

While I was in thought, Mururu looked up towards me puzzled.....as usual her eyes looked sleepy, like she was in some kind of a daze.

“But yeah, I thought you'd be here much earlier than us as well.”(elf)

“Really?”

“I was sure you'd be here already and would have completed all preparations beforehand.”

“How serious do you think I am?”

[That's right.....haah.]

Really, I don't have such a serious personality. Well, I do tend to get things done earlier though.

Also, Ermenhilde? If you give such a big sigh, even I'll feel a bit bad you know?

"Well, some things happened last night."(renji)

" 'things'?"

"Yes, 'things'."

[You were just getting scolded that's all.]

"Please shut up there, will you partner?"

[And, got drunk as well.]

"Seriously. Could you not resist at least the day before?"(elf)

"I got invited. And, I didn't oversleep due to drinking too much."

In the first place, I'm here before the time to leave, so you can't even call this oversleeping.

But, I should just let go of that point. Rather than yielding, it's more fun to talk

about like this.

Feirona as well, while making an amazed face, was laughing.

[Seriously. It's because you're always acting like this, you get scolded.]

"you got scolded?"(mururu)

"Well Mururu, we adult men have to deal with a lot of things."(renji)

When I said that in an exaggerated manner, her sleepy face became a bit sullen. While finding that slight change in her expression amusing, I turned towards Feirona.

"So, what were you guys up to?"(renji)

"Nothing at all, I guess."(elf)

"Got bored."(mururu)

From what they tell, when they offered to help with loading the luggage as well, they were politely refused. I guess as Ms Francesca's friends, Melentia-san must be treating us as guests.

We wouldn't really care much about it but from the point of view of a noble, they simply cannot be discourteous enough to make their guests do something like manual labour. It's how their mannerisms are. Nobles really have a all sorts

of troubles as compared to even me.

Mururu didn't really care about anything at all, but I'm sure Feirona is also bored but he understands the situation and decided that it'd be better to just stand here doing nothing.

Since it was still early in the morning, there weren't many people around other than us. Only the soldiers on guard duty around the area were patrolling the place. Since near the gates, there were no guilds or bars, there weren't many adventurers to be seen either.

"What's with the getup?"(elf)

"hm?"(renji)

"That equipment is different from what you wore earlier right?"

"Oh, yeah. I just took back my equipment I had left with the King for safekeeping."

When I said that, Feirona made a slightly surprised face but Mururu simply made a fuun~ sound. What a waste to brag in front of her.

"Your reactions really are weak eh?"(renji)

"It's because I don't know what's good or bad about such armour/equipments."(mururu)

“Because you’re a beastwoman? I guess your own body is your weapon and armour, eh?”(elf)

“Yes.”

“But still, at least show some interest. Really, give me a reason to explain about it.”(renji)

She puffed her chest with pride making her look cute. But seeing that her tail was swaying around, she must be happy. Though I doubt Feirona said that as a compliment though.

And suddenly, as if she smelled something, she brought her face close towards me.

“It smells like the forest.”(mururu)

[So you can tell?]

“I have a strong nose.”

Saying that, Mururu made a short sound with her nose. I as well, imitating her, brought my sleeve near my nose. I am at an age where I still get worried whether I’m smelling of something weird after all.

“Smell of the forest?”

“Fruits and grass, like the smell of deep inside a forest.....and also, wind. The smell of Earth spirit Gnome and wind spirit Sylph.”(mururu)

“The protection of the spirits eh? As expected of the equipment used against the Demon God, I guess.”(elf)

At Mururu’s explanation, Feirona also reacted. Looks like he already figured what my equipment was like. As expected of an elf and beastwoman who live alongside the spirits. They are really sensitive to such protection on equipment, I realized that once more.

Equipment forged by humans is definitely strong. Whether it be made of iron, steel or silver. But all those, slowly deteriorate over time. And can even break if used relentlessly.

But, equipment like mithril ones made by dwarves or the ones imbued with the protection of spirits made by elves, as long the spirits do not remove their protection, their ability will not reduce no matter how much time passes. It’s effects reduce in dead places like the forest of rotting souls but in the Elfheim continent where we are headed, and in Abenelm, the protection is very strong. I know from my journey one year ago, they give more defence than it shows.

And it seems these two understand that as well.

.....Really, looks like I don’t have a reason to explain about it at all.

“How uninteresting.....you guys aren’t giving me the fun of explaining about it at all.”(renji)



“Renji’s long talks are, difficult to understand.”(mururu)

[At times, he does like to talk in an overly theatrical way after all.]

Mururu spoke that while averting her gaze. I don’t recall giving any such long explanation before though. What kind of character am I inside Mururu’s mind?

It’s really making me curious now. While thinking that I will have to properly talk with her once, I looked around. When, I saw Solnea sitting on a nearby bench. Since it was still slightly hazy outside as the sun hadn’t not risen properly, the black dressed beauty looked somewhat like a ghost sitting there. Having low presence, and with that dazed expression, and neither was there any will in her eyes. If a child saw her, they’d think of her more like a exquisitely crafted puppet rather than a human.

“If you really think that. I might have to teach yu a bit.”(renji)

“.....I’m fine.”(mururu)

“But it’s fun you know, studying that is.”(renji)

You come to know so many things you didn’t know. That’s a one of a kind feeling as well I think.

I think that way probably because before I used to hate studying and did not enjoy my job at all. But after coming to this world, learning to read and write desperately, understanding the basics of travelling, ecology of monsters, usage of weapons, way of fighting; though neither of those were truly necessary to survive in this world, I still recall how happy I felt to find those skills of use to

me. Even if it was something I vaguely knew, it was still nice feeling to see others depend on me for once.

Knowledge is power. Having understood that very well, I was thinking of really teaching lots of things to Mururu once I get the chance.

“Not just me, even Feirona and Ms Francesca have studied a lot you know?”(renji)

“ugh.”(mururu)

“Right?”(renji)

“Fuh,.....yeah, that’s true.”(elf)

When not just me but even Feirona nodded, Mururu averted her gaze trying to run away. Looks like she really bad at it. But the fact that she’s not openly rejecting the idea means she doesn’t hate it either.

Beastmen are a race that ‘run’ inside the forests. I guess, sitting in one place and reading a book, that is ‘not moving’, must be not liked by them.

“She did try to read a book alongside Francesca at the inn but she got bored of it pretty quickly.”(elf)

“Feirona, I told you to keep that secret!”

“Oh, so something like that happened as well.”(renji)

And Feirona gave an exaggerated shrug. Since he’s normally calm and cool, seeing him tease Mururu like this was really amusing.

Mururu being herself, shut up when talk about studying came up. Even her tail that had been swaying around had dropped down towards the ground. Even her wolf ears seemed to be slightly drooping a bit.

“Maybe you should ride the carriage with Ms Francesca and try spending the journey reading a book with her?”(renji)

“I refuse.”

Instant reply. The vigour behind her words made it even more amusing.

“Really? Riding the carriage, protected by the escort team, travel while reading a book. You might get to feel like a noble girl, you know?”(renji)

“I don’t like it.”

Looks like Mururu didn’t enjoy that kind of life like Ms Francesca as well. Though she probably wouldn’t mind the former part of that.

“Too bad. I was thinking of making fun of you about how it didn’t suit you at all.”(renji)

“Renji, as usual, you’re such a bully.”

“Well, I can’t help it. That’s just how I am.”

When I gave shrug while saying that, Mururu moved behind Feirona as if hiding from me.

[Looks like she hates you now.]

“I don’t think that’s it though.”

And, she started hitting Feirona’s back. It doesn’t seem like she’s putting power into it though. Even Feirona was smiling at it. It feels more like I just made my daughter sulk, that’s all.

“Now then, it looks like we still have some time so I’ll go take a look there okay?”(renji)

“Sure, I leave it to you.”(elf)

Saying that, I moved away from them and towards the bench on which Solnea was sitting on. Did she not move even a bit while we were talking, it looked like she was in the exact same posture as before. Does she not even get tired?

Sitting beside her, only then did some change finally appear on her. That said, all she did was look towards me.

“Good Morning.”(renji)

“Yes.”

“You greet others with a ‘Good morning’ when you meet them during the day, Solnea”

“.....Good Morning.”

When I said that, she repeated my words like a parrot. I doubt she even understands the meaning behind it. Thinking about how I should explain it to her, I was a bit lost for words. Now that I think about it, why do we say ‘good morning’ to each other everyday? I recalled even my own childhood, but couldn’t find the answer. Before I knew it, I was saying that as if it was normal. Because my parents always said it every morning, I did too.

They say children imitate their parents but do they also imitate every habit or greetings as well? Somehow, my own sea of thoughts seemed to have been affected a bit.

“Is something wrong, Renji?”(sol)

“Nah, nothing. That aside, we’re about to go on a journey but did you feel something different?”

“Not really.”

Thought so.

The biggest enjoyment of journeys is to get to see new places, meet new people, and sometimes earn money. It differs for everyone. But as far as I could think, Solnea had no such reason at all. It's because this woman simply holds no interest in anything at all.

Even though she's technically living, except some information, this woman has nothing at all.

She doesn't have the feeling you get when you see something beautiful or amazing, and neither does she hold any kind of greed for something. Those [emotions] that humans have before they even fully understand it, she doesn't have any yet. They are attained through growth as a child, and matures as your own body matures along with it. What one could call as your [spirit/mind], she doesn't have it. At least, I don't sense it in her.

"I see."

Was I supposed to say something more, or is this fine for now? I really am not good at thinking up topics to converse about. I haven't racked my brains so much even when dealing with a merchant.

As if she felt something from me, Solnea continued to stare at me.

"What is it?"(renji)

"No. Did I do/say something wrong?"(sol)

“.....What?”

“It feels, different than before.”

“Different? What exactly?”

“I don’t know.”

It felt like a proper conversation, yet not actually a proper one. What a weird exchange of words. Maybe she realized that I was thinking too much before to her talking?

But, after that, her gaze soon diverted away from me. She, once again, stared towards the mercenaries doing labour. I had no way to put my question/doubt into words properly.

“Are you curious?”(renji)

“Of what?”

“Why I felt different than usual to you?”

“Yes.”

Once more, her gaze turned towards me. Her emotionless black eyes, looked really deep and cold. It looked like a bottomless pit. I was being looked at by such eyes, but I looked straight at her and didn’t look away.



“Then, ask. If you are curious about something, ask me, ask me anything you want.”(renji)

“Okay.”

But that voice was as well, completely flat, empty.

She resembles her, I could say, she resembles the weapon Ermenhilde, when I first met her. Not Eru, back when I still called her Ermenhilde. Her, that was nothing more than a weapon, and Solnea, who’s not even that much.

Thinking that, I shook my head. Eru was Eru. Solnea is Solnea. I may not be able to help associating the two but it’s rude to compare them with each other. To both of them.

“So, did you find something interesting?”

“No, I was just wondering about what they were doing.”(sol)

As expected, neither her gaze nor her voice held any kind of emotion in it. Just like the time we met, she’s just saying what she thought of.

“What do you think of it?”(renji)

I latched on to her words, and questioned her further. I don’t know if this is

the right way but I have no other way to start a conversation with Solnea except by using this tactic or by bringing up a topic that might get her curiosity.

Normally, I can sense things from the tone and gestures of the person but with Solnea, that's also very difficult. There are very faint fluctuations in her at times but it's not enough to tell whether she's actually showing interest in something or not. She just doubts things slightly, that's all.

“Wearing extravagant clothes, they work hard for others to gain money. Just what kind of merit is there behind all that?”(sol)

“Well that's quite the philosophical question, or should I say, a difficult to answer question.”(renji)

“Philosophy?”

“It refers to the study of the root and meaning behind everything.”

When I said that, she continued to stare at me as she probably didn't understand. Well, I doubt the concept of philosophy in and itself exists in this world right now, so that's the proper reaction.

In the first place, I myself don't know much about it except the meaning of the word itself. No, maybe I don't even the meaning of the word itself properly either. Maybe that's also a part of philosophy as well.

“Humans, can live as long as they have something to eat, water to drink and a place to live. They don't even need money or even clothes for that matter. Is that what you think?”(renji)

“No, I don’t. Wearing clothes gives a sense of relief and to get clothes, you need money. And the more money you have, the more decorated clothes you can buy to dress yourself up. You can hire people to protect you. By doing that you attain a sense of security and peace. Thus, money and clothes are also vital to a person’s life.”(sol)

“.....You’re pretty smart, aren’t you?”

Looks like Solnea has been looking at the beings called as humans more closely than I thought. Since her words were stiff and formal, it felt even more philosophical than it should have.

But still, I haven’t been spending time with her recently so who did she hear that from I wonder? The ones who could tell something like that were.....either Feirona or Ms Francesca, I guess. Mururu, doesn’t seem the type to think of such stuff in the first place.....maybe it’s a bit rude to say that though.

In any case, seeing that she had become able to think this much even when I wasn’t around made me feel a bit shameful. Maybe, I am not needed as much as I thought I was.

“No.”(sol)

While I was beginning to feel slightly uneasy for the journey we were about to leave on, Solnea spoke up as we she was trying to refute me. I looked towards her trying to question why she said that but she was still looking in front.....towards them mercenaries doing labour.

“I don’t understand. A person should be able to live on by just thinking about themselves.”(sol)

“.....”

“Why do they then, try to help others? I simply cannot comprehend.”

“Hmmm.”

A person can live if he just cares about himself. It’s a definite fact but.....I wonder. I think there will be no perfect answer to this till the end of time.

Building a house, cultivating crops, rearing cattle, gathering water to drink. Certainly, all of this can be done by a persona alone.

“But, it’s not possible.”(renji)

“Why?”(sol)

“Because somehow, people are just made in a way that cannot bear to live on alone.”

For example, a conversation. It can’t be done alone. I doubt any person can bear to never ever talk to anyone else, it’s far too lonely——I know that very well. And so only other humans can remedy that.

That's why, I think no one can live alone forever.

But Solnea must realize and understand, feel that by herself.

"Well, all of that, you will understand slowly, one-by-one as we go on here onwards."(renji)

"And is that fine?"

"Yes it is. That's what we all call as 'life' after all. I think."

I'm not certain either. Even though I've reached the middle portion of my own life, I still don't have the qualification to talk about the meaning of life I think. That's the job of priests and monks, and of Gods, I believe.

"Say, Solnea."(renji)

"Yes?"

"Did something really fun happen to you yet?"

When I asked that, I felt like I sensed slight ripples in her emotionless eyes.

"No."(sol)

But her answer was the same. In the same voice, without any change.

“Even when you laugh, and Francesca and others laugh, I don’t.”(sol)

It seemed like she truly mourned and regretted that fact. It really felt that way.

“Is that so?”(renji)

“Yes.”

“.....Do you want to laugh?”

“I don’t know.”

I guess, this much is fine for now. Just a little, very slightly——feeling the baby steps, a very small one step, in her voice, I stood up from the bench.

“Then, I’ll talk to you later.”(renji)

“Yes.”

Should I have told her, that maybe one day you will become able to laugh. Thinking of that, I left the place.

That conversation really made me feel only more uneasy about the upcoming journey. The Demon God that hated humans.

Now then, I caused lots of troubles for both Utano-san and Ermenhilde yesterday but what should I do?

“But still, it’s quite rare to see you stay silent all of the time.”(renji)

[Hmph. I just sensed the mood wasn’t right for it.]

To think that one day I’ll hear something like that from your mouth. I, am deeply moved, so much that I might cry.

Giving a wry smile thinking about how she would be puffing her chest if she had an actual body, I saw another figure stand nearby Feirona and Mururu. As I walked towards them, the figure turned towards me.

“.....Oi.”(renji)

“Ah, good morning.”

I glared at Aya who gave a greeting as if it was all normal, but she simply ignored it like it was nothing. Seriously, this is why I hate people who have gone through life-or-death battles. Threats become completely useless.

“Why are you here?”(renji)

“Well, when I woke up I saw Renji-san leave for some place so...”

“You followed me?”

“How rude. I was worried that’s all.”

“Hou?”

Wearing her original equipment like me, Aya played with her hair as she spoke that with a smile. Beside her were two bags, probably necessities for travelling.

Sensing the atmosphere, both Feirona and Mururu were quiet and were looking around.

“I think I clearly told you ‘no’ about this?”(renji)

“Yes, you did. But Renji-san, you see, I have been invited to Ms Francesca senpai’s house as well.”

“.....What?”

This is the first I’m hearing anything about this. When I looked towards Mururu, she simply gave a nod.

“Last night, we decided that at the inn.”

“After I had decided about journey eh?”(renji)

“Well, I wonder. I wouldn’t know anything about that.”(aya)



How shameless.

The next day after I was told about Solnea by Astraera, I talked about this journey and its objective with King Joshua, O’Brien-san and my former comrades. There, both Yui-chan and Anastasia made a strong request to come as well but I rejected them. Solely for of my own satisfaction of not wanting to let children take part in another such dangerous journey. And of course, Aya wasn’t an exception to this so I refused her as well. In the first place, as an adult I made an excuse asking what she’d do about her school.

Since I knew that she wouldn’t accept it, I lied telling that I’d be leaving tomorrow and only told the truth to King Joshua and Utano-san. But it looks like Aya saw through it and was one step ahead than me.....even though I actually tried to use my brain for once to come up with this.

I recalled how Utano-san seemed to be acting strange this morning, it must be because she must have realized Aya’s actions as well. Well, she is much better at this than me. But then, that means that even Utano-san has allowed her to go through with this? Even though she was also on my side in not letting children take part in such dangerous things.

Or maybe——am I the only one who still thinks of Aya as a child?

“Ah, Toudou-san packed a bentou(lunch) for us as well.”(aya)

“Yay!”

Just those words alone made Mururu speak up with joy. Her tail was also

moving around more energetically than before. Feirona was silent, he was basically leaving the decision to me.

“Say, Aya.”(renji)

“Eh, um.....yes, what is it?”

When I asked again, she looked up towards me with a slightly more scared expression.

“Did you talk about this with Utano-san?”(renji)

“.....N, no but I was thinking of sending a letter when we reach Merdior.”

That, is basically meaning that I’ll be the one getting scolded by her. That woman, all said and done, is pretty lenient towards children after all. And in the end, I am the one who has to deal with the repercussions. That’s become basically an accepted fact now.

Having said that, Aya’s gaze didn’t seem to calm down as she was thinking that I’ll be scolding her.

When I pressed on my temples with my hand, Aya’s expression clouded further. Well, at least it looks like she understands that what she did was wrong. Although, it’s not that bad to be honest. Getting in danger, making others worry.....I don’t really have the right to lecture others about it do I? That’s why I had instead decided to tell Souichi and Aya the wrong date instead.

An adult that doesn't mind children putting themselves in danger.....might exist but that's not what me, Utano-san or anyone else wants.

Thinking of how I could persuade her, I also wondered whether it was right to always treat her like a kid. Now, which is the right answer?

"Mururu. Let's have our lunch over there."(elf)

"Sure. Renji, later."(mururu)

Saying that, Feirona took Mururu away with him. Really, that guy sure knows how to read the atmosphere well. Eremenhilde, I hope you learn something from him. Mururu was waving towards Aya as well. Really, these girls get along really well.

"So,"(renji)

"Yes."(aya)

At my voice, Aya almost curled up her body stiffening up. What happened to all that confidence you had before?

".....Are you really coming just because Ms francesca invited you?"(renji)

"That's——"

"I won't get angry so tell the truth."

“.....No.....”

I see.

I took a deep, long breath. Oh well.

“Fine.”(renji)

“Eh?”

“I said it’s fine. I’ll write the letter to Utano-san”

Or rather, since we haven’t departed yet, she could just run back to the castle and.....I guess that’d be impossible. And considering it’s that woman we’re talking about, she probably already knows that this would happen. Can this be also called trust I wonder?

Well, I’ll just have to send a letter through a peddler from Merdiore. There were no proper mail delivery service in this world yet so it was normal to hand over letters to travelling merchants and peddlers. There’s not much secrecy and if that peddler got attacked by a monster and died, you will have no idea where that letter even went though. There’s that, or using magic familiars as carrier pigeons but.....oh right, Ms Francesca is a magician as well. Though I never asked her, I doubt she has one. I’ll try asking Melentia-san later.

Anyway,

“You decided this yourself right? Then I don’t really have a right to say anything.”(renji)

She’s 18 already. This is third year after coming to this world. She understands the harshness of journey’s very well. The danger of battles, the pain from injuries, she knows that all yet if she chose to come, I don’t have a reason to stop her anymore.

I’m not Utano-san but maybe I’m pretty lenient as well. Yeah, I am. She’s just 18. Rather than going on a long journey again, she should be at the academy, making friends. Even though I know that.....I end up also feeling reassured to see her travel with us as well.

Yes, it’s reassuring. Do not mistake it as ‘happiness’. That would be pretty troublesome in all sorts of ways as an adult after all.

I wonder what she was thinking as Aya’s expression was still a bit gloomy. I guess she’s thinking that I’m still angry with her. And I was quite angry when I saw her here.....I think.

I don’t want her to be reckless, I don’t want her to be in danger. I want them to go to school and study like every child does. I think that way as an adult, as her guardian but in the end, it’s just being self righteous. Ignoring Aya’s will, that would be my will instead. I know that—is not right. I have been told that quite a lot of times back then as well, but still somewhere deep inside me that feeling still remains. She’s just 18 yrs old, I can’t just ignore that.

.....no, no matter how hold Aya and the others get, how big they get, I’ll remain the adult and they’ll remain as children.....I’ll end up thinking that way I’m sure.

I turned to look towards this child. She has gotten taller in the past one year. And she has gotten prettier as well. I'm sure in the future she'll become a beautiful woman. I wonder what kind of face she'd make if I said that. But that would be contrary to my principles of [teasing]. In my opinion, teasing should always be to enjoy the other person's reactions. You should never mix real emotions in it.

"You've grown."(renji)

[What, that came out of nowhere.]

"I was just thinking that she's grown up as well. See, she's slightly taller right?"(renji)

Back then, she barely reached my chest but she's taller than that now. When I said that, Aya's expression became slightly relieved.

"But,"(renji)

"Yes!?"(aya)

"Do not be reckless, okay? I promised to protect you so when you get reckless, I have to put my life on the line to protect you."

"That's....."

"I don't intend to die. And neither do I plan on letting you die .....It'll be a

dangerous journey but let's come back alive, with everyone."

With everyone. Once we lost lots of lives in that journey. But this time, I don't plan on letting anyone die. Will that be so difficult? Am I being too naïve to think that way?

I think I am.

But even then, I end up saying that anyway. Because if I don't, I can't move ahead. I must get rid of all ill thoughts. That's why, I make promises. No matter how difficult, painful,.....or sad, it may be. To protect a promise, I can move forward. That's how weak of a human I am.

"Thanks, Aya."

Taking another breath, I said that.

Because I'm weak, that's why.....I'm happy to get to travel with Aya like this. I won't say it out loud though.

"Eh?"(aya)

[How rare. You're such a contrarian though.]

".....that, Utano-san called me that yesterday didn't she?"

Don't use words you don't even properly understand. I laughed.

“Even like this, I get lonely pretty easily. The more comrades the better.”(renji)

“Oh so that’s the reason…….”(aya)

When I said that, Aya seemed visibly depressed. Even her shoulders seemed to have dropped a bit. Since I thanked her I guess she must have been expecting something more from what I’d say next but do you really think I would say something like that so easily?

When I laughed, Aya looked up towards me bitterly. That reaction is definitely amusing.

——I guess, I have been feeling a bit too uneasy for this journey.

Saving the world, reviving the Demon God, request from the Goddess……at the end of this journey, sacrifices will be made definitely. I can’t change that.

Solnea was worried about the fact that she couldn’t laugh. Right now it’s nothing more than just a vague doubt but slowly, she has been starting to question a lot of things. I feel like that’s something to be happy about. Right now Solnea doesn’t have anything like emotions but after seeing a lot of this world, and learning more……I can expect more from her.

But,

In the end, she has to live as a Demon God. As not Solnea but as the Demon



God, a life not of a human is waiting for her. I wonder what would she say when I tell her that?.....Well, I did take Astraera around to stalls though. Thinking that, I realized how absurd my own thoughts were. As expected, alone, my thoughts will go in the wrong direction. That's why, having Aya in front of me is reassuring.....she looked really lovely as she tilted her head as I looked at her though.

Looking towards Solnea, she was simply looking here with a dazed expression.

If she laughed, she'd really be such a beauty.

"What's wrong, Renji-san?"(aya)

"Nah, about Solnea....."

"What about Solnea-san?"

"She'd look really beautiful if she smiled right?"

"....."

[.....What?]

Instantly, my side was hit by an elbow.....I thought I'd break a bone, seriously.

Even though that was just a joke to get rid of the heavy atmosphere. Since she

hit me pretty well, I actually felt a bit out of breath. As I slouched forward slightly, Aya walked away leaving me. And after walking a bit, she turned back to look over her shoulder towards me.

“Renji-san, no breakfast for you today.”(aya)

Saying that, with a smile, Aya walked away towards Feirona and the others. Why did she look so scary even when she was smiling?

“So harsh. It was just a joke.”

[You get what you deserve.]

I guess.

Well, it’s better than starting the journey with a heavy atmosphere. I truly think so.

## Chapter 61: Start of the Journey ③

By the time they were done loading the luggage in the carriages, the sun had begun to peek through the mountains in the horizon. 5 carriages stood lined up near the North gate, and their drivers took their seats. At the same time, Ms Francesca, Melentia-san and Solnea boarded in the frontmost carriage. After them, the 10 adventurers also got on their horses and took position around the carriages.

The gate was still big enough to easily let everyone pass, and the guard on top of the walls shouted to open the gates. As the soldiers to the side of the gate turned the crank handles, with a heavy sound, the massive wooden gate began to open.

Our vision opened up. And the dim, silent world came into view. Black mountains, blue clouds, and the chilly air. It's the moment right before sunlight takes over the world.

As the sun began to slowly peek more and more from the other side of the mountains, colour seemed to return to the blackened world. While witnessing that moment, we got on our horses as well. At the same time, the drivers of the carriage made a 'Hyah!' sound, and began to move the carriages forward.

"You look like you're having fun."(aya)

Aya, as she rode up beside me on her horse, said that with a smile. That said, Aya herself seemed to be enjoying this as well or was it just my imagination?

“Yeah. As I thought, I simply enjoy travelling a lot.”(renji)

[fufu.....well, this is something you just can't get tired of seeing after all.]

“Yeah. Even though I see this scene almost everyday, I just can't seem to get bored of it.”

While replying to Eremnhilde, I brought up my horse beside the front carriage. The knights of the Barton house rode alongside the carriage 2nd from the front. And the rest of the adventurers beside the remaining carriages. To the right of the front carriage were me and Aya and to the left were Feirona and Mururu.

Even if it is a paved road, its still not asphalt like modern worlds. While riding above the uneven road, the carriage moved while making noise. While finding that sound pleasing to the ears, I looked towards the sky. Few early birds were flying through the air while making *chiichii* sounds that mixed with the sound of the carriage wheels.

“Aya, do you hate travelling?”(renji)

“No, I like it as well. If I didn't.....well, I won't be able to chase after you, right?”(aya)

“I see.”

She hesitated a bit probably because her words held a lot of emotion behind them. While feeling some of them, I turned to look towards her to only to see her smile bashfully under the ever-increasing sunlight.

A strong wind blew past us. Aya's hair and robe fluttered and so did my mantle as well. Once again, I turned my gaze back towards the sky. The clouds seem to be moving fast. But the air doesn't feel like its getting damp. It doesn't look like it'll rain. It's the perfect weather to depart. I felt not just my mind, but body feel lighter as well.

"Once again, I'll be in your care."(renji)

"Eh?"

"We're travelling together again. So, I'll be in your care."

When I said that again, Aya made a surprised face. But when her face oddly shifted towards a smile, maybe she thought she had been teased, she averted her gaze in embarrassment.

You know, I properly mean things that I say sometimes. I don't mean to be vague in that sense.

"Yes!"(aya)

And after a moment's time, she turned back and answered with a wide smile. Her smile was so befitting a girl of her age and she truly looked happy. This expression suits her the most I believe.

Having a childish smile, yet having that habit of trying to be as womanly as possible. Since Aya possessed both of those sides to her, I wonder which I Aya

do I prefer more?

[You're not gonna say that to me?]

"Huh?"

[That, 'I'll be in your care', or something like that?]

While I was worrying over a question I had thought over countless times, Ermenhilde asked me something weird as well.

What kind of demand is that? Aya thought the same as she was also hiding her mouth with her right hand as her shoulders shook with laughter.

Well, I guess Ermenhilde's excited from the new journey as well. Seriously —how human-like she is.

"You're always with me aren't you?"(renji)

[muu]

"Fine, it's a bit late but——for this journey as well, I'll be in your care."(renji)

Are you happy now?

When I implicitly asked that, Ermenhilde went silent.

“.....You two really get along, don’t you?”(aya)

“I wonder.”

[fufufu]

As I rode my horse while looking at the slightly pouting Aya, with a slight knock, the window of the carriage was opened. The one who peeked out was Melentia-san. The wind made her honey coloured hair sway. Looking inside the carriage, I saw Ms Francesca talking with Solnea.

Before we departed, I had asked Ms Francesca to take care of Solnea, and by the looks of it, everything’s fine. And Solnea’s expression was the same as usual. For just a second, maybe she realized my gaze, she seemed like she gave a sidelong glance towards me. Matching her, Ms Francesca looked towards me as well but before either could say anything, Melentia-san spoke up.

“Renji-sama, Aya-sama, Are you two not feeling cold?”(mel)

“Thank you for your concern but we’re fine. We are used to travelling after all.”

“I see. If you need anything, please do not hesitate to ask.”

“That consideration alone is enough for us.”

After I said that, the window was closed once again. Since I felt a gaze, I

looked towards Aya only to see her looking at me with narrow eyes. Of course, she wasn't smiling either.

"You seem to be on quite good terms with her."(aya)

Why do her words feel so much more sharper than before I wonder?

While thinking of such foolish things, I cracked my neck a bit. Though I can't really call it stiff, it still somehow makes my shoulders feel stiff whenever I have to talk like that, using words I don't normally use. Maybe I should ask Aya to massage my shoulders tonight. I thought of that, but wait, will that be considered as sexual harassment?

"I was just talking politely, that's all."(renji)

"It didn't seem that way to me though?"

Hearing her low voice, I ended up laughing instead. Even while knowing that it'll only make Aya angry, I couldn't stop myself. And as expected, Aya's expression became even more sullen. This way of talking is normal if you have to take part in formal balls and parties. You could say that I have heard that almost infinite times from other noble ladies who came to me attracted by the title of the Hero. My talking with Melentia-san is the same.

That still doesn't mean that I am well acquainted with the mannerisms of the high society but I have had to talk to a lot of people. I am confident that I can read a person's thoughts, at least the surface thoughts that is.

Melentia-san is a merchant. Nothing more and nothing less. That's the only



reason she's sticking with us. Because both me and Aya, as heroes, are worth it. That's what it's like, to be merchant from the very core. Preparing horses for us, and going to Merdiore together is also because she must be gaining something from it. This world isn't gentle enough that I'd think that this is all because she's Ms Francesca's family. World, or rather, the society at least. Even if their society is a hundred steps behind ours, human beings still don't change that easily. I wonder who was it that said that?

By having us as their escort.....well maybe not, but even by just riding the horses alongside us might have some kind of appeal for her. Now was I too distrustful of others? But in anyway, I won't just accept this at face value. There's a lot behind it.

But still— —I haven't even done anything that would make me be called a Hero though. Well, since she didn't travel with us, I guess she won't know that.

"Looks like you still have a lot to learn as well, Aya."(renji)

".....Muuu."

If she doesn't learn such subtleties, there is still time before Aya can debut in the high society. I doubt that overprotective Utano-san would ever let Aya appear there like she is now. Like she is right now, she'd might even get fooled by some bad guy.

Well, I can be considered as a 'bad guy' as well though. After all, even I know how indecisive I have been. Just because I don't want to destroy our current relationship.

And even though I realize that.....I still continue talking like this with Aya.

“You’ll understand someday.”(renji)

“That part of you, hasn’t changed at all.”(aya)

“hm?”

“.....treating us like children.”

Aah, I see.

But as she sulked like that, she did look childish. Souichi said that Aya was trying to be like an adult. So that she could stand by me. Recalling that, I end up thinking, that I never asked her to be like that.

Sulking childishly like this, getting angry, puffing her cheeks, talking without any restraint, laughing, doing something stupid and then getting scolded; that’s the kind of relationship I want. That’s when I can act normally.....and relax.

But if I say that, Aya would again get angry saying that I’m still treating her as a child though. I know that, so I didn’t say anything and took off my left glove. As I felt the cold wind, my fingertips felt like they were going numb. Man, winter really is harsh.

“I’m not really treating you as a child though. That’s not my intention at least.”

Saying that, I rested my hand on her head. Rather than caressing it, I just rested it there, like lightly hitting her head. I haven't grown out my hair but I think that it's quite trouble to properly set your long hair. That's why, I didn't stroke her head and ruin her hair.

"Muuu."

But even then, she still seemed dissatisfied. She doesn't seem very angry but still Aya's horse went slightly away from me.

Wait, was this sexual harassment as well?

I thought, but had no answer. Though she didn't say anything till an year ago, but I think she's at an age where I should really stop doing such things. Should I be happy to see children grow, or should I feel sad to see them change? Well, it's probably the former.

Turning away from Aya, I looked ahead. Our destination was still very far away. It'll take about 5 days to reach Merdiore from the capital. It's closer than Magic City but still pretty far. At night, we plan on getting a room in a inn in a village so we might take even more days to get there.

[What a boring journey.]

While I was putting on the leather glove, Ermenhilde suddenly muttered that. Both me and Aya burst into a short laugh at that.

[Hm?]

“A boring journey is perfect for me though.”(renji)

“Same.”(aya)

[Really? I really want Renji to act more like a Hero sometimes though.]

“.....You’re still saying that?”

It really doesn’t suit me. As I gave a shrug, Aya giggled while hiding her mouth.

“fufu, I think it might suit you as well though?”(aya)

“Oh please. If I started acting like a Hero, no amount of lives would be enough for me.”

[Isn’t that why I, the god slaying weapon, am with you though? What happened to the vigour you had when saving Ms Francesca or Mururu?]

“Rather than saying I saved them, saying that we were fighting together is more correct.”

Both the black orc and the Skeleton were strong enemies for me and I don’t know what would have happened if I was fighting them alone. When I think that way, it’s more correct to say that we fought together.

But Aya who didn't know that, looked towards me with slightly shining, curious eyes. She was with me only till just before I fought the Skeleton and she still doesn't know that she had unknowingly killed that skeleton while using that powerful fire magic to get out of underground. And after that, I lost consciousness.

While I was thinking that, the carriage window was knocked once more. Looking that, the window opened to show Melentia-san once again.

"Do you mind, if I listen to that tale as well?"(mel)

"Well, it's not really exciting and nothing more than a story of a normal monster subjugation though. Is that okay?"(renji)

"fufu, of course."

Hmm, so she had closed the window but was still hearing us?..... Or is the window itself so thin that voices can pass through normally. I was a bit confused inside but I realized that Ermenhilde was talking as well. Maybe Ms Francesca, who can hear her [voice] told that to Melentia-san? Thinking that I looked towards them but they were on the other window offering sweets to Mururu. What the hell are those guys doing? They get along so well, I'm almost envious of them.

Maybe it's because Ms Francesca is always feeding Mururu different things.....well, whatever.

[Then, since Aya's here as well, why not start from one year ago?]

When Ermenhilde said that, Aya's expression visibly lit up. It's really nothing that interesting though.

One year ago. After killing Nayfell, we 13 came back to the capital to rest. Aya only knows till there. After returning to the capital, resting in my room.....the next day, before the sun rose, like today, I disappeared from capital Imnesia.

After that, what happened at the capital, I don't know. From what I've heard, Utano-san made various arrangements and prepared a good rumour to be released in the public explaining my disappearance.

Now then, after that.....what did I do?

"That said, I don't remember doing anything more than desperately killing monsters like right now though."

[Well, that's true.]

At the very start, I was pretty serious as well. Desperately, as if trying to torment my own body, I went around killing lots of monsters. Now that I think back at it, I was doing nothing more than taking out my anger.

Eru died, and even when she was revived after pleading to Astraera, it was a completely different person. Not knowing what to do, I did nothing but kill more and more monsters with Ermenhilde in my hands. Yeah, that was just me venting my anger.

And after some time, I ran out of fuel. After a half year had passed, I recall that I had not a single speck of eagerness or willingness left in me. And other

than that, I just travelled around to fulfil my promise to Eru. Around when I had run out of even travelling expenses, I met Ms Francesca. Seriously, what an unexciting tale. Even a minstrel with an incredible voice and pitch could not make this into an exciting tale.

“Where should I even start from?”

[First of all, in the one year that Aya wasn't there, Renji saved three women.]

Oi, idiot, stop. Don't fabricate my past.

Fearfully I turned to look towards Aya but she was still smiling waiting for me to tell her about it.....why does it feel so oppressive even though she's smiling? If others weren't here, I might have fallen in a pitfall and then buried with just my head above the soil I think.

Melentia-san who couldn't hear Ermenhilde didn't show any change but inside the carriage, Ms Francesca was suppressing her laughter. Seeing as how hard she was trying to suppress it, my woman troubles may end up as a topic of laughter here. Solnea, without a care about anything else, was simply eating the snacks inside the carriage.

“Let's see.....Hm?”(renji)

[What happened?]

When I suddenly pulled the reins of my horse, the horse panicked slightly from it.

While we were casually walking our horses, I saw a small shadow inside the grass. There's no way any human children could be here so it was most definitely a goblin.

I narrowed my eyes but I couldn't confirm his existence. Well, most probably, they're—less than even 10. If it's just that much, I doubt they'd attack so many adventurers. Calming my horse down, I lowered my speed.

“What is the matter, Renji-sama?”(mel)

“Nothing, there are some monsters in the grass that's all.”

When I said that in a light tone, Melentia-san's atmosphere became stiff. On the other side, it looks like Feirona and others had noticed as well as Mururu had stopped eating and was glaring in front.

Looking behind me, it didn't look like the adventurers were in turmoil or anything yet.

“Goblins?”(aya)

“hm? Yeah. So you sensed them as well?”

Well, if they stand out that much, it's only normal. Seeing her cold gaze, I once again realized the difference in our specs.

“Well with this many adventurers, they probably won't attack.”(renji)



“that’s true.”

Monsters aren’t fools. They would never be stupid enough to attack more than their own numbers. Though there are such idiots as well sometimes, but they’ll only lose.

But just because we had more numbers, I don’t intend to be negligent. And it was the same for other adventurers as well. After leaving the capital.....a place protected by walls, outside was the land of monsters. It’s a harsh world where death is always beside you.

Even with such pretty scenery, sweet air, and comfortable wind. This world, has yet is simply lacking that dreamy feel.

“Will it be fine?”(mel)

“There should be no problem. If something happens, it’ll be taken care of.”(renji)

“fufu. That’s very reassuring.”(mel)

Well, I didn’t say who will be the one taking care of it though. Having realized my words, Aya gave a sigh beside me. Of course, without letting Melentia-san see it, with me in front as a wall.

But in truth, if goblins did attack, before they could even reach us, they’ll get finished by Feirona’s arrows and Aya’s magic. Goblins—no in fact, even if it

were lizardmen, that should be enough. Well, since lizardmen live near water, they don't really appear near the highway though.

“So, we were talking about an year ago right?”(renji)

“Yes, about how Renji-san seduced three women, or something.”(aya)

[umu.]

Don't 'umu' goddamnit. I didn't seduce them!

.

Aah, I'm so tired.

As I breathed out as I sat down on my bed, Feirona, who was sitting on the other bed, looked towards me. In the morning we travel as much as we can and at nights we have decided to rest at the various villages between the capital and the Commercial city. As expected, nobles don't like to camp outside. Well, since they won't get to bath in that case, so it's only normal.

“You seem awfully tired today.”(elf)

“I enjoy travelling but not talking this much.”(renji)

The whole day, I had to talk about my past. Though not as much physically,

but I'm really tired mentally. Because I knew this would happen, I had refused to ride the carriage with her but in the end, it didn't matter much.

Well.....I didn't expect even Aya to be so interested in my story as well though. I guess, she really was worried for me after I had disappeared alone. Thinking that, I felt a bit uneasy inside. I should stop, this isn't like me. Thinking that, I cracked my neck.

"Considering that, I think you talk quite a lot even normally though?"(elf)

"That's just when with I'm with people I know well. I may not look it, but I'm pretty anxious around strangers you know?"(renji)

"fuh, Well, I wonder how serious you are about that."

While enjoying talking with Feirona, I moved around my body as it felt lighter after removing my equipment. Maybe because I didn't exercise much recently while at the capital, I felt like my body had grown a bit dull.

It looks like it was the same for the blonde elf as well as he was also moving around his body as he took off his equipment, trying to release the stiffness from travelling so long.

By the way, I had handed over Ermenhilde to Aya after coming to this village. I don't intend to use her in front of people and I do have a proper normal sword.....well, Ermenhilde really hates that though. But, I want her to go and chat with other girls as well sometimes. Even though I'm being considerate for her, she still dislikes it.

Right now, they should be taking a bath together or something.....Wait, is it okay to put a medal inside hot water?

“So?”

“hm?”

“You said that we’ll travel to the Elfreim continent but what’s our final objective?”(elf)

Oh right, I had still not told them our final destination.

“That means, you’re accepting on the point that you’ll travel with me to the other continent?”(renji)

“Yeah. Our chief did say that I should go and be of help to you as much as I can, after all.”(elf)

By chief, he meant the chief of the elves living in the forest of magical energy, I guess. Hm, did I ever do anything to gain his favour?.....I thought but couldn’t think of anything.

Maybe I may have helped him indirectly sometime, somewhere?

“And, I’m personally interested in this journey of yours as well.”(elf)

“Oh?”

“Even when I was with you back at the Magic City, being with you turns out to be quite interesting and stimulating after all.”

“fuh.....that’s not a very different from a conservative Elf’s way of thinking, isn’t it?”

“I know.”

Elves normally don’t leave the forests that is their territory, so Feirona who often worked in the Magic City was already a bit special. And now, he’s even willing to cross over to another continent. It’s quite dynamic for an elf who normally hate any kind of change.

“Yeah, so we were talking about our objective right?”(renji)

“Well, don’t you want to negotiate the reward before that?”(elf)

“I don’t think I’d be able to win against you in that anyway.”

“That’s coming from you with the smooth tongue?”

Smiling at his joke, I looked outside the window. The sun had set and it was already dark. And the only thing lighting up this world of darkness were the faintly shining magic lamps.

The villagers walking about in that dim light seemed to be really excited. It’s probably because a big noble group had come to their inn. This village even had

a big item shop, bar and a brothel as well. I can't see it right now but I saw many adventurers go in and out of those places. They must be happy to have people in the village who would spend so much money at the same time.

Melentia-san and Ms Francesca had their household knights with them, and in the worst case, Aya was also there. They wouldn't be in any danger, even if something sudden happened.

"For the time being, my request is for you guys to only accompany me till Merdiore. There's a chance someone could hear us here after all."(renji)

"I see."

The fact that he didn't ask anything more shows that he understood that the topic is not normal enough for others to hear. Really, this Elf is so dependable. His thinking and deduction abilities are great.

"So, what are you going to do now?"

"Let' see. Maybe take a bath and then cool down at the bar?"(renji)

Basically, the same as usual. Feirona who knew how much I loved drinking didn't say anything on it. If it was Ermenhilde, this where her sighing and scolding would start.

Slightly missing that as well, I really can't be helped. I ended up bitterly smiling at myself.

“Then, tonight I’ll accompany you as well.”(elf)

“Oh, sure. It’s more fun to drink together with someone rather than alone. It’s too lonely otherwise.”

“I’m coming to keep an eye on you. If left alone, you’ll probably be lying somewhere drunk.”

Huh? Wait, why am I being thought of as a bad drunk now??

I haven’t drunk till I dropped in.....quite a long time now though.

“.....While in the middle of a job, even I won’t drink that much, you know?”(renji)

“I wonder about that. Weren’t you drinking last night as well?”

Saying that, Feirona left the room with a wry smile. He was holding a change of clothes under his arm. Bringing out a set of new clothes from my bag as well, I followed after him.

Other than the shared room me and Feirona were using, the second floor also had private rooms which were slightly more costly. They were the few rooms at the end of the corridor. At the door, a knight was standing. Then that must be Melentia-san’s room. Originally Ms Francesca was also supposed to have her own room, but then Mururu would be left out so they shared a room as well. And Aya and Solnea were sharing another room. At their doors as well, knights were standing.

Am I the only one who finds that to be weird instead. At least, Aya was making a troubled face as well. It would be fine if it was well built room like in the castle but wouldn't sound pass through since the walls and doors are wooden?

"What's wrong?"(elf)

"nah, it's nothing."

Did he find me looking at the knights to be weird as Feirona stopped and spoke up to me, but I shook my head. Well, I doubt they would converse about anything that should not be heard. And if she was really troubled by it, she'd come ask either me or Ms Francesca. And , all said and done, Aya is used to such a lifestyle as well. She wouldn't care since it's only for a few days.

"Also I overslept this morning because last night, I drank and made someone drink something weird along with the alcohol that's all."(renji)

"What do you mean?"(elf)

"Well, lots of things happened. Really, a lot....."

When I said that, he realized that it wasn't something that he should ask deeper about so he left it there.

Just like that, we headed towards the bathhouse on the first floor. Since there were many customers other than us as well, it was pretty crowded. Since not



every house in a village would have a bath, there are even villagers who use this inn's bathhouse.....It reminded me of the public-baths of our world. No, since there was no roof, I guess I should call it an open air bath. Since the female section was on the other side of a big wooden wall, it made it even more similar.

Without minding it much, as I took off my clothes, a slight commotion arose inside. The reason was my own body. My whole body was covered with numerous scars. Since I could feel the gazes, I could tell.

“This isn't the first time, but really, that is incredible.”(elf)

“Not really.”

Any adventurer who has gone through a lot of hard battles would have such a body filled with scars in my opinion. Thinking that, I looked down at my own body. Most of the scars here were left by the Demon god Nayfell. The rest are from times when I wasn't with Yayoi-chan, but most of them are from Nayfell.

Since I didn't have my own magical energy, even with Yayoi-chan's abilities, my wounds were hard to heal so the wounds given by Nayfell remained prominently. The power granted by the Goddess and the Demon God's power itself. Comparing a granted power to a God's own power, it's clear which would be stronger. And since I was even more difficult to heal, the scars remained.

Well, to a man, scars were a medal of honour. I thought of it optimistically like that. Though sometimes, in fact many a times, it ruins the mood though.

“Now, if I had a few on the face as well, I'd look really cool.”(renji)

“Fuh, you don’t change no matter where you are, don’t you?”

“I’ve just gotten used to it that’s all. It’s important to get used to others seeing you with curiosity after all.”

That said, Feirona’s body was completely clear. On his pure white skin, typical to elves, there was not a single scar. Elves have high self-healing abilities and taking the help of the spirits, they could even further enhance that ability so this was obvious. Here, rather than feeling envious, I felt like I’d won at something more; I must really have gone crazy.

After taking off my clothes, and washing down my body, I dipped myself into the big bath that could let almost 10 people in at the same time. It must be a magician taking care of bath as even with so many people inside, the water was still crystal clear. It’s temperature was perfect as well.

“Fuu…….”

Why do humans leak out a voice whenever they enter a bath I wonder. Submerging myself till the shoulders, I thought of that.

Aah, I can feel my tiredness get washed away. As expected, taking a bath after a long journey is a blissful experience. And drinking after washing away your fatigue is even better. I’m so excited that I can’t wait.

Ermenhilde isn’t here with me either so I can enjoy without restraint. While I was relaxing myself like that, Feirona also entered the bath a little space away from me. So as to not let his long hair get wet, he had tied them above his head

with his towel. Looking at just his face, mixed with the beauty of elves, he really looked like a woman.

“At first I didn’t really understand why you liked resting your body in hot water so much but, certainly, this is really comfortable.”(elf)

“I know right? Whoever thought of baths the first time was a genius.”

“Yeah, true.”

A few kids, probably from the village were running about inside. And it looked like the adults who were probably meant to look over them weren’t here either so it was pretty lively inside.

Well, this is also one of the charms of a public bath indeed. When, my gaze went towards the wooden wall separating our bath with the women’s.

“What? Curious about that side?”(elf)

“.....in your head, just what kind of problematic guy am I?”

And, what does he mean by ‘curious’? I am interested in women but I don’t have a hobby of peeking at women whose names I don’t even know. And such a joke wouldn’t sit well with Melentia-san or Ms Francesca. And Aya wouldn’t hesitate to throw me in a pitfall as usual or blow me away with less powerful spell. In either case, I’ll end up with injuries. In Mururu and Solnea’s case.....I don’t know. I feel like those would give no reaction even if they were seen. At least, Solnea wouldn’t.

“Sorry, but I’ll get out first.”(elf)

While I was thinking about their reactions, Feirona stood up beside me and left the water. He’s still not used to these so can’t stay inside very long.

Then, thinking maybe I should as well, I stood up. After all, it’s pretty lonely to be here all alone. Even though back then it was normal for me. In the past, Souichi and others were really embarrassed to enter the bath together. Well they were in that kind of age so it’s normal but I wonder since when was it that they got used to coming with me?

While thinking of that, I finished changing clothes. Putting my dragon bone knife on my belt for emergency purposes, my clothes other than that were a normal set of light tunic and trousers. It was the same for Feirona.

“Well then, let’s go drinking shall we?”(renji)

“Yeah. Seriously, only at such times do you sound so lively.”(elf)

“It’s one of the greatest pleasures of travelling, drinking and eating a village’s tasty dishes, that is.”

“I guess that’s very like you, seriously.”

While hearing Feirona’s amazed voice, we walked out into the night village while laughing. Sometimes, being alone with a guy isn’t that bad either. Since Ms Francesca and Mururu were always with us till now, looks like tonight

should be fun.

## Chapter 62: Merdior ①

After crossing over the gently sloping hill, far away, but clearly, we saw a huge group of buildings—it was a city surrounded by tall walls, and behind it was the sea. It was slightly smaller than the capital but its population was more. It was the Commercial City, Merdior.

At the same time, the blue sky, and the vast blue sea that spread till the horizon, the barren mountain nearby, and the grass plains spread around the city, all came into our view. The most attractive of them all was definitely the blue sea. I think, if we head forward a bit more, the beach should also come into view. While I was looking at the scenery while matching it with my memory as well, Mururu, who was riding with me on the right side of the carriage today, slightly pulled on my mantle.

“Hm?”(renji)

“It’s the sea!”

“Yeah, that’s right. I think soon we’ll start seeing the sea birds as well.”

“.....yeah!”

Had she not seen such a scene very much, as Mururu was simply staring at the sea without being cautious of her surroundings like she usually is. She really must like it. I thought that beastmen didn’t really like the seas and the oceans though. Or maybe she’s really been moved by the scenery?

I hope it's the latter. While thinking that, I glanced inside the carriage. Solnea's expression, while looking at this scenery, was the same as always, emotionless. But at least, she's still looking that way. Ms Francesca beside her was talking about something. Probably explaining her what a sea is.

It should come as obvious but this world also has seas and oceans. Being called as the mother/origin of life, this world's water bodies hold far more creatures living inside than ours I believe.

The most striking among those are of course, the monsters. Instead of pirates that can be usually found in the seas in normal fantasy stories, almost all of the seas are ruled by the monsters. From small monsters like Sahagins, Kelpies, and low level spirit Nereus, there also giant monsters that could destroy a ship alone like Hydras, Krakens, and Aspidochelones. Instead of normal sea birds, there are Harpies, Sirens, and Echidnas, monsters that show up quite a lot in fantasy stories. Well, Harpies normally live on top of mountains so they don't usually come down towards the seas/ocean.

It is far more dangerous than being on land and not just the monsters, even the weather is an enemy. If you get caught up in a storm, there is no way to run and since ships in this world are still made mostly of wood, they can break very easily. To the people of Merdiore, such knowledge was common sense and they are quite used to it in fact. But to the people who have always lived away from the sea, it is a terribly fearsome place.

Of course, it's not easy to swim in it either. If attacked underwater, no matter how strong of an adventurer you are, it won't matter. It's already tough just staying afloat, there's no way you could swing a sword inside water due to the resistance. It is the same for magic as well. You can't swim and concentrate enough to use magic either.

Were you expecting swimsuits? Such illusions don't apply to this fantasy world.

Now you'd wonder if the seas are that dangerous, how does a proper sea route to Elfheim continent exist.

I'm not too knowledgeable in the topic but from what I've heard from Utanosan, places exist where two different types of water connect with each other. In our world as well, there are areas where fresh river water joins with sea/ocean water. Now what difference it makes, I'm not too sure of that but apparently the concentration of salt and oxygen changes in such areas.

And in this small borderline, monsters don't attack.....or rather, attack lesser than normal. I really have no idea but the sailors are experienced with it. Rather than calling it a professional job, it sounds more like a sage's job to deal with such things.

By the way, the sea birds I talked about with Mururu just now were the normal ones that also existed in our world. They also end up as prey for the Harpies and Sirens though. Forget the illusion about monster girls as well. After all, these are meat eating beasts. Literally. There are no dreams or hopes here.

"Now that I think about it, Mururu came to Imnesia on a ship right?"(renji)

"Yes."

"How was your trip?"



“I don’t know. I was inside all the time.”

“.....”

Oh right, she was a stowaway on a ship. Recalling that, I glanced towards the carriage. Looks like since Melentia-san had closed the window, they didn’t hear that.

Phew, I sighed in relief.

[This beast girl really is a carrier of lots of troubles, isn’t she.]

“It’s fine. I’m still less than Renji.”(mururu)

“So you agree that you bring trouble? Also, I have not yet caused any such big of a trouble/problem.”

“Eh?”

[.....Haah.]

When I said that, Mururu looked at me truly amazed and Ermenhilde gave a heavy sigh. Those reactions are as if implying that I do create problems.

“No, I really haven’t, you know?”(renji)

“So the person himself really doesn’t realize it, I see.”(mururu)

“No, really, are you one to talk? You too have brought quite a lot of problems Mururu.”

“Sure.”

No, don't just agree at that. Or rather, I should really stop this. Feeling sad as I gently caressed my horse, it gave a small neigh. Feeling slightly healed from just that, I began to trot further down the highway.

Since yesterday, we have been passing by quite a lot of people on the highway as well. Although most of them were merchants as we are close to the Commercial city after all. Most of the adventurers also stuck close to the carriages they were escorting and there were almost no adventurers actively fighting against the monsters on the plains. Even though goblins and kobolds do appear here as well, in the end, the world of monsters also works on the principle of survival of the fittest. All these low level monsters end up as prey for the Harpies. Though Goblins can use swords and spears, they aren't skilled enough to use bows as well, so to Harpies, Goblins are an easier prey than humans.

Thus, even though goblins appear in huge numbers near every city, they rarely come out here. And when they do, they are easily dealt with.

Instead, the bigger problem was the tall bare mountain that was visible even from here. It was tall enough to even pierce the clouds in the sky. And that whole mountain was infested with Harpies, so much that you could see them if you went a little bit closer. They have the lower body of a bird and the upper body similar to that of a human. But it's only resembles a human, and they can't even talk or communicate with us. And they don't think of humans as more

than prey either so we can also only treat them as monsters.

[‘You too’, you said. I’m not sure what to think of that.]

“.....”

At just those words, I felt my eye flinch. Could it be that I unconsciously accept the fact that I bring problems?

“Renji-san!”

Just when I was thinking of that, Aya called towards me in a panicked voice so I turned look at my surroundings. Beyond the gentle slope was a vast open grasslands. I would clearly see monsters approaching even if I didn’t want to. Confirming that there weren’t any, I turned to look at the sky. But, there were no monsters there either.

“What happened, Aya?”

“In front, the mountain.....”

Being told that, I looked towards that mountain. With my eyesight, I couldn’t see harpies yet but——narrowing my eyes, I noticed a big dark spot.

Huge. Harpies are the size of middle school children normally, but this was just too big. I can’t exactly tell how much bigger this was but it was probably more than just a few meters.

“.....A griffin.”

“You can tell, Mururu?”(renji)

“Un.”

Hearing her muttering, I turned towards her to see that she was also looking that way. And her narrowed eyes could also tell the true identity of that figure.

A griffin. They have the body of a lion, and the head of an eagle. With big wings on their back, it can fly with the power of the wind spirits—It was a demonic beast.

It was a mid size demonic beast that normally doesn't live on Imnesia and only appear in Elfheim and Abenheim.

“Are you sure it's a griffin?”(renji)

“You can confirm with Aya as well.”(mururu)

When I asked again, Mururu pouted in displeasure. No I didn't mean to offend you, I just found it hard to accept that truth.

While thinking of apologising to her later, I kicked at my horse and moved towards the other side of the carriage—with Aya and Feirona.

“Aya, Feirona, can you see it?”(renji)

“Yes, but.....”(aya)

“This is the first time I’m seeing one but aren’t griffins supposed to not be on Imnesia?”(elf)

“Yeah.”

Agreeing to Feirona’s question, I looked towards the mountain again. But that black spot wasn’t visible anymore. It must have flown to the other side of the mountain. Griffins usually create a nest on top of such tall mountains. That’s also one of the reasons Griffins don’t usually live on Imnesia. There are very few tall mountains like this in all of Imnesia. They aren’t nonexistent, of course, but that would limit the places where Griffins could live heavily. So they simply don’t live here.

Well, it’s not like we’re biologists or anything either though. As long as we know how to take down and subjugate a Griffin, that knowledge is more than enough.

“Ah, not more trouble again.....”(renji)

[fufu, looks like I don’t have to be so bored again.]

“Oh please spare me.”(renji)

I’m the one whose life is on the line you know? Hearin her voice resound in my head, I literally scratched my head in worry.

Griffins don't exist in Imnesia. So that also means that people of Imnesia don't know how to fight against griffins as well. Even its ecology and habits are only vaguely known. Just like what I saw and experienced was different from what I had read in the books. I don't know since when did that griffin start residing here but the fact remains that nobody has been able to subjugate it yet. Even though a beast like that making a nest so close to major city would make it an instant target for subjugation.

Glancing towards Aya, it looks like she was also looking towards me as our gazes connected. She looked like she was excited, probably because a griffin wasn't really a match for her. Even though it'd be a desperate fight for me.

"This is why I didn't want to accept Her (astraera) request."(renji)

I'm sure I'll be facing all sorts of troubles in the future as well. Am I just that unfortunate, or does Astraera push this trouble on me knowingly? I feel like it can be the latter but sometimes the former seems pretty plausible as well.

While I was worrying about such stuff, the carriage's window opened and Ms Francesca peeked out.

"Is something the matter, Renji-sama?"(fran)

"nah, it's nothing. That aside, is Solnea okay?"

"Eh? Ah, yes. She seems to be enjoying the scenery."

That's okay, then.

Looking up at the sky, it was as clear as it could be. If I had wings, I would just fly away forever. I tried to escape reality like that.

And Solnea, as usual, dazedly looked at me.

.

.

.

The sea breeze caressed my cheeks as I smelled the sea. Merdior.

Surrounded by 10m tall walls, and with sea to the west and north of it, the city was a bustling place.

After one of the knights showed the pass to the guards, we entered the city. The first thing that came into view was, simply, a lot of people. Not just humans, but even demihumans and beastmen as well. In between, I could even see a few fairies, like Anastasia, Hobbits, and bearded Dwarves as well. There were even Elves like Feirona and beastmen of all kinds of tails and ears.

A lot of people, from a lot of different races. It was city filled with those. That said, compared to the capital, the city was only a third as wide. Due to that, the congested crowd stood out even more. Now whether you see that as a lively place or simply an overcrowded place, depends on perspective. There are a lot of people in the capital as well but this city felt like it had more energy.

[As usual, there are so many people.”]

“But it’s fine though.”

I hate crowds but being in such a lively place makes me feel energetic as well. Well, I wouldn’t ever think of settling here though. After all, there just too many people here. I’ll start feeling fatigued in just a few days I’m sure. Since the salty sea breeze would damage wood, most buildings were made of stone. And since Merdiore wasn’t very big in terms of area, most buildings also had two-three storeys as well. Though I know how rare earthquakes are here, it still looks really dangerous. Every building in the main street had a signboard in front of it; bars, weapon shops, item shops, etc were lined up. To attract customers, the shopkeepers were shouting loudly about the best bargains they were giving.

“Well then, let us proceed, shall we?”

The carriage window opened and Melentia-san urged us to move ahead. Lightly kicking the horse, we proceeded ahead. Even though it was so crowded, the fact that the path for carriages and horses was not obstructed is because the rules of this city were set and were being properly upheld by the citizens. Even though there’s no special law or fine to implement it, the fact that those rules were still being followed was proof that the public order of this city was very stable. Also, and even though so many horses and carriages were passing, the people weren’t really looking towards us either and were continuing with their own business.....Basically, this was a common sight for them.

It was a year ago, the last time I came here but compared to that time, the faces of the people are smiling even more. And Mururu, who was beside me, was looking around curiously at her surroundings.



“Is it your first time seeing something like this?”(renji)

“un.”

Even her reaction was given slightly absent-mindedly. I guess she’s really been captivated by this scene. I guess it’s appropriate for her age, but still it felt amusing so I ended up laughing but she didn’t even notice that. Normally, she’d glare at me, scold me or pout whenever I treat her like a child though.

“But wait, this shouldn’t be your first time in Merdior right?”(renji)

“.....At that time, I was only thinking of getting to the capital as fast as possible.”

“Hmmm.”

Now that I recall, she really was pretty unsociable when we first met. A request from Zwenelia.....in this case, it should be an oracle, I guess? That duty was top priority in her head.

Saying that she was ‘dutiful’ might sound nice but I really doubt that it’s okay for you to think only about that at all times. You’ll miss out on seeing such a beautiful world.

“Later, maybe we should go together and hit some stalls in the area?”(renji)

“‘Hit’?”(mururu)

“Meaning that we can go together and visit and check out the various shops and stalls here. I’ll treat you to one skewered roasted meat as well.”

“.....Really?”

She looked really lovely as she asked that while tilting her head, questioning me.

“Yeah.”(renji)

Honestly, I’d love to get a drink to go with the meat as well but as expected, I can’t take Mururu with me, she’s still too young. I do want to let her taste alcohol one day though.

I replied that but she averted her eyes. But her lips clearly revealed that she was happy. If I can get to see such an expression, I don’t mind treating her once or even twice.

Next time, maybe I should take Astraera as well. I was thinking of that when the carriage turned from the main street to a smaller road.

“Oh right, have you heard anything about Ms Francesca’s home?”(renji)

“Nope. She said that we’ll understand when we see it.”

“I see.”

I felt that it might be quite rude to not know anything about it before going to someone's home so I thought of asking Mururu about it. Her family must be a family of merchants for generations. I wonder what kind of position/status they have in Merdiore.

Since they said they'll prepare a ship for us, maybe they are in trading business? Or are they just rich enough to own a personal ship?

If I recall correctly, in Merdiore, except for the City Head, there were many nobles who run various businesses. To say simply, there are nobles who manage and control the circulation of arms, items, manage the port, and the coming and going of people as well. All these jobs were under different nobles. And above that, they are also working together and cooperate to earn as much profit as possible.

Thinking of that, I think Ms Francesca's family must be in charge of managing the port. Though I have no recollection of ever hearing the name of Barton family, they might be powerful nobles. Her, by power, I mean in terms of assets. After continuing through the off-street for a while, we got out into an open area. It's the residential area where mostly nobles reside. We were in the higher class districts, basically. Climbing up the slightly slanting road, buildings clearly much luxurious than the ones on the main street came into view. Since the area was at a point even higher than the walls, you could see the scenery outside the walls till the horizon at the sea from here. Truly, it's place only rich people would have. That said, you could see this scene from the port as well though.

"So many houses."(mururu)

"I know."

Since here not even the sea breeze could reach, there were even quite a few buildings made of wood as well. And in quite a lot of colours as well. Is this perhaps trending in the whole world or was it just the hobby of nobles, I wonder.

Travelling through the wide road where even 2 carriages could run side by side, we went past the district. In an even upper class district, there was the house. In terms of size, it was even bigger than the colourful one we just saw. It's painting was also very orthodox, and in my opinion this looked better. But, it did feel slightly empty maybe because we just saw such coloured houses.

In front of the gate of that house, was man wearing butler clothes with another young man standing behind him. And along with them, a lot of maids were waiting for us.....or rather, for Ms francesca and Melentia-san. Coming close to them, I climbed down the horse and handed over the reins of my horse.

"Thank you for accompanying us through the long journey. If it pleases you, why not give us the privilege of servicing you at our house?"(mel)

"Thank you very much for your consideration. But, there is something I need to see to so I'll be heading to the guild first."(renji)

"I see."

"I apologise. Even though you were kind enough to invite me....."

"No, please don't mind it."

I know it was rude to refuse her like this but I'm really worried about that griffin. Judging from the people in the streets, there isn't any commotion about it yet but it'll be too late once anything happens.

Before there are victims, before they multiply, I must deal with it.

[fufu, you seem quite eager today.]

"Is that so."

For someone like me who hates such trouble, really, even I wonder what am I doing. Now the serious one or the trouble hating one, which is the real me?

While thinking of something I had no answer to, I bid farewell to Melentiasan, Ms Francesca and the rest of the adventurers I had travelled with.

Mururu looked a bit lonely but we're still in the same city. They can meet whenever they want to. And since we have to get a ship from them, we'll have to go and meet them sooner or later anyway.

That's why, even though ms Francesca also seemed lonely, she didn't seem too sad. Since we told her the name of the inn we'll stay in, she can come and meet us anytime. By the way, the inn we're staying in is the same inn we had rented all those years ago when we first came here. It's a bit expensive but, I figured it'll be nice to pick the same one this time as well. Indulging yourself is also one of the pleasure of a journey, in my opinion.

"Well then, Ms Francesca, see you later."(renji)

“Yes.”

That’s all the words I need to say. As long as I’m alive, we can meet again. With new encounters also come farewells. And thus, reunions also exist. That’s what travelling is all about. Along with Aya pulling along the reluctant Mururu, we left the Barton mansion.

And , I’m sure they’d contact us soon enough. Since we travelled together, I’m sure they’d want to treat this connection more precious. And about Ms Francesca as well, this wasn’t a proper farewell anyway. Mururu’s so attached to her after all.

“So, what are we doing next?”(elf)

“We’re heading to the guild. I need to ask about that Griffin and learn what’s going on around here.”(renji)

“That’s right.”(aya)

Aya also agreed to my suggestion. It looks like she’s a bit worried about seeing a griffin on this continent as well.

The distance from the district to the guild was quite a lot so in the way, I bought and treated Mururu to a roasted meat as promised, which made Aya jealous so I bought her one as well and now I couldn’t let Solnea to be the only one without it, so I bought her one as well.

Feirona paid for himself but still, I had to pay for 4, including me. What is this feeling of exhaustion I'm getting?

But since Mururu seemed happy, I guess it's fine. If I don't think of it that way, I'd start feeling sad.

"is it tasty?"(renji)

"Un."

"that's great, then."

While eating the meat together, we walked down the pathway. So that they don't get lost, Mururu and Solnea were holding on to my mantle. I totally feel like a father.

Both Aya and Feirona were smiling looking at me like that but I pretended to not notice and continued eating. Or rather, isn't Solnea too old to look like a child? She looks like a beauty in her twenties after all. She's even taller than Aya. Well, her mind isn't even a year old though.

"So, is it tasty?"(renji)

I asked the same thing to Solnea as well.

Solnea tilted her head for a while, and then,

“Un.”

Imitating Mururu, she gave a small nod as well.



## Chapter 63: Merdiore ②

When you think about port cities, you think about ships.

At the Merdiore port, a few dozen merchant ships were anchored, and inside, an even more number of battleships were anchored as well. The main, and the only difference between a merchant ship and a battleship was the size. In our world, they'd have artillery and cannons attached to the ship but this world's ships don't have any of those. Because they have something more convenient-magic.

If the monster is clinging close to the ship, they'd fight it at close combat and if its far, they'll use magic to blow it away. This is the way battles usually occur on the seas in this world.

The ships are made of wood, and if I had to compare, they were close to the galleon ships used during the age of discovery in our world. It has 3-5 masts, can run pretty fast and can carry a lot as well. On the other hand, they are weaker against impacts to the sides and not just monster attacks, even huge waves could make them lose balance and could even overturn them.

The battleships were slightly wider and more balanced than merchant ships though. It also had the same number of masts but was comparatively slower. It's currently folded, but normally the Imnesia flag is visible on the sail as well.

The number of crew members required for a merchant ship was about 300 people and 500 for a battleship. In a sense, the port itself seemed to hold an air of intimidation.

“Well this is amazing.”

Feirona, instead of his usual calm mood, spoke this with a dazed and surprised expression. He looked towards the ship, then looked at the slightly muddy water, then looked at the ship again. Maybe she found it amusing, Mururu observed Feirona as he continued to stare at the ships.

“Is this your first time seeing a ship?”(mururu)

“Yeah. I hadn’t left the forest very much before this after all.”(elf)

“I see.....It’s really fast.”

“Is that so.”

Mururu spoke that, somewhat proudly. And Feirona talked with her while laughing slightly. It’s like looking at an older brother and sister.

And even Solnea was dazedly staring at the ships.

“What’s wrong?”(renji)

“No, I was just thinking that so many people can ride on it.”(sol)

Looks like, rather than the ship, she was looking at the people on the ship instead. Just to load the luggage into a merchant ship, dozens of people were

working together. You'd expect them to use magic to do all such stuff like its shown in normal fantasy settings, but this is more realistic. After all, lifting items and carrying them with magic exhausts far more magical energy than you'd expect.

Though there was a time when Aya carried tens of barrels at the same time through magic, it was only possible because she has magical energy in a whole different level, a gift directly from the goddess.

To me it really looked like she was doing it very easily though. Really, not having magical energy is such an inconvenience. Since I really have no perception about it, I can't even talk about it like a normal human. In fact, there have been times where I have been told to have a thought process like that of a Elf, pixie or other such demihumans.

"Yeah. You need hundreds of people just to move the ship after all."(renji)

"is that so?"(sol)

"If there's strong wind, just spreading the sails would allow the ship to move but without wind, they have to manually row it with oars."

"Oar? What's that?"

"See those insect like legs coming out from the bottom side of the ship? Those are oars."

[What kind of analogy is that?.....]

It's fine, they honestly look like that to me. Solnea, for once, seemed to be hearing me properly as she was focused on the oars.

Seeing us stop just staring at the ships, the sailors gave laughs. But that wasn't sneer but simple amusement at Solnea and Feirona's honest reactions which probably made them happy.

To the sailors, their ship was their life. Just like a sword is to a swordsman and forests are to elves, to the sailors, seeing such an honest reaction towards their ship makes them feel proud and happy, I recall being told that once. They really are devoted to their jobs, and I still remember how every man seemed to be connected from their hearts.

.....I also recall being made to work hard like crazy after we departed as well. I wonder if that also counts as 'good experience'. I really can't decide.

"Renji?"

"It's nothing. So, are you curious about anything else?"

"You should ask anything you want Solnea-san. Renji-san knows a lot of stuff."(aya)

".....Don't make it sound like I know everything though."

I felt a bit embarrassed being praised by Aya like that. To be honest, in terms of extent of knowledge, I feel like Aya might be aware of a lot more things than

me. I only know about lots of things but very shallowly. But her knowledge about the topic she knows is deep. And she really excels in explaining things as well.

Unaware of my thoughts, Aya gave a giggle and looked up towards the ship while standing in between me and Solnea. Seeing her press down her hair blowing from the wind, I felt a 'womanly' charm in her I never saw a year ago which made me give a wry smile. Should I see that as growth or should I see this as some change in my own feelings towards her?

[What happened? Captivated by the scenery?]

"Well, something like that."(renji)

As I breathed out, Ermenhilde tried teasing me. When I shrugged at her words, Aya looked up towards me in confusion. Telling her that it was nothing, haah, she didn't seem satisfied but she didn't pursue it any further.

"But still, to think it's the first time Feirona's seeing a ship."(renji)

"Yeah. I am looking forward to it but I am also slightly fearful of whether something so big can really float on water."(elf)

"hahah, I guess that's normal."

"Since wood floats on water, is that principle used behind this?"

"Just think of it that way for now then. Now I'm looking forward to sailing

with you.”

“As usual, you are such a tease.”

“I don’t think I am though.”

When I said that, except Solnea, everyone gave a sigh at me. Of course, even Ermenhilde. Well, I’m used to this treatment now.

It looks like Mururu isn’t that affected by Ms Francesca not being with us anymore. No, I guess she’s pretending to not look lonely. I think I’ll have Aya keep her company for a while.

“fufu. If you’re surprised from just this, you’ll be really amazed when you’re on the ship.”(aya)

“I see.”(sol)

“fumu……..I look forward to it.”(elf)

When Aya said that while looking at those two, Solnea, in her usual flat voice, and Feirona, in a slightly more excited voice than usual, replied back. Solnea aside, seeing Feirona so excited like that was so rare that both me and Mururu exchanged glances with each other.

“Then, Renji, can you operate a ship as well?”(sol)

Is this due to the comment that apparently, 'I know a lot'?

Her expression was the same as always but somehow, it looked like she was trying to look deep inside me as well. It made me feel awkward making me scratch my cheeks which made Aya burst into a funny expression.

“Unfortunately, I do not know how to operate a ship.”(renji)

“There is something Renji can't do as well?”(sol)

“You, what kind of person do you see me as?”(renji)

Smiling at that weird question, Solnea made a blank puzzled expression. Her face was asking why I was laughing. That was weird as well, but right now Solnea doesn't understand that.

“The things I cannot do are more in my case.”(renji)

“Really?”

But, the one who reacted to my words was Mururu. She looked up at me suspiciously.

“Renji's actions differs from what he says.”(mururu)

“.....How rude.”(renji)

[That's because you try to leave things for others to do even when you can do it yourself.....haah.]

When I gave a shrug, both Feirona and Aya ended up laughing.

“In the first place, a ship isn't something one man alone could operate.”(renji)

“What do you mean?”(sol)

“There's the ship's captain, then there are sailors who work as per his commands. Then there's also a vice captain, navigator.....there are a lot of different people working together, only then does the ship move.”

But it looks like Solnea didn't really understand what I was trying to tell her as she remained silent and was still waiting for me to continue explaining. I am not really good at explaining but this was really amusing. But still, she's asking quite a lot of questions today.....thinking of that, I recalled that it was me who told her, in front of Ms Francesca house, to ask me if she wanted to know anything after all.

She's really obedient to everything I tell her. In fact, it made me feel like she was waiting for me to tell her that all this time.

“So, are you interested in the ships?”(renji)

“No.”

But, her reply was a simple one word denial. Her expression towards me as I



dropped my shoulders was the same expressionless as always making me feel all the more exhausted.

“But, it looked like you were interested in them so..”(sol)

“Eh?”

It was Aya who reacted to those words. Probably, I feel like something like a wall exists between her and Solnea.

“Renji, are you interested in ships?”(sol)

“Ships, or rather, I just love the sea, that’s all.”(renji)

Feeling the salty sea breeze, the beautiful scenery untainted by science. If only the monsters didn’t exist, it would be the best thing ever in my opinion. Also, there’ll be swimsuits. Well, the Aspidochelone that sometimes appears can also look like a whale so you can enjoy it as a part of scenery as well. The giant monster Aspidochelone is actually a harmless monster. But its so large that its size alone becomes a huge problem.

“The sea, is it?”(sol)

“The scenery from atop the ship is incredible you know? Though travelling on foot or on horses is also fun, its amazing on ships.”

When I laughed while saying that, Solnea turned to look back at the ship. As expected, still no expression. But it looked like she was staring at it more

enthusiastically than before.

While I was looking at Solnea, my left arm was pinched slightly. Turning towards the culprit, Aya was looking at me with half open eyes.

“Well then, since it’s no use just staring at ships, let’s go to the guild shall we?”(renji)

“Yeah.”(elf)

“un.”

Feirona and Mururu answered back. Solnea turned away from the ship as well and began to walk alongside those two.

“We should get going as well.”(renji)

[Yeah.]

“ .....

The strength on hand pinching me lessened and turned more into Aya walking while holding on to me with her fingers, making me give a bitter smile. It’s quite fresh, walking like this without letting anyone else realize. I think so.

“Don’t get lost, okay?”(renji)

“.....I’m not a kid anymore.”

.

.

.

As I opened the Merdior guild’s door, a few gazes turned towards us but realizing that we were also adventurers, they soon lost interest.

Checking the place, I saw dozens of adventurers spending time freely. Half of them were enjoying drinking and eating though. Seeing that, I was confused. Did something good happen?

“What’s wrong, Renji-san?”(aya)

“I’ll go ask some stuff. My face should work as well. Wait for me.”

Since it’d be weird for them to wait right at the door, I asked them to get seated somewhere. Since I’m more used to such stuff, I should be the one to do it. And not to mention, there are a lot of people who know me here.

Around 2 years ago, we stayed almost a month in Merdior to subjugate monsters. I should be able to make use of my connections from back then, I think.

While thinking that, I walked towards the reception. Just like the guild at the capital, there were multiple counters set and all of them had lines of adventurers. Joining the shortest one, I tapped the shoulder of the adventurer in front of me. With a really bothered face, he turned towards me.

“.....What?”

“Did something happen here? The guild seems a lot more lively than usual.”(renji)

“Aah, last night, there was a huge monster subjugation. They’re dividng the rewards right now.”

I see.

I recalled the goblin hunt at Magic city. Since there were a lot goblins to be subjugated by a lot of adventurers, the reward was of course divided. But when huge monsters are taken out by many adventurers together, this happens as well. It’s nothing rare but it looks like more than 20 adventurers here. If it’s a monster that needs that many adventurers.....was it an Ogre? And maybe multiple of them?

“Did they take down Ogres or something?”(renji)

“Something even bigger.”

Saying that so proudly, Hehehe, the man laughed as if bragging. Judging by his appearance, he should be in his thirties so he should be quite experienced. At least, he shouldn’t be the type to consider Orcs or Harpies as something great.

“It was a Griffin, a Griffin!”

“.....Griffin, you say?”(Renji)

“Yeah. They’re as good as blind at night after all. So last night, we stayed awake climbing the mountain.”

The man was talking proudly but I could only tilt my head in confusion. Because after all, I saw a Griffin just close to Merdiore.

[What the hell is this guy talking about?]

Well, I want to agree with Ermenhilde as well but it doesn’t look like he’s lying either. And above all, the atmosphere inside the guild was really proof.

“But, I also saw a Griffin though.”(renji)

“Aah, that’s because we haven’t killed them all.”

Those words alone made it all the more nonsensical for me. The way he spoke means that they took down more than one. Well, though Griffins are tough demonic beasts but as long as you know the way, you can take them down fairly easily. In the guild, not just humans, even demihumans—probably elves or dwarves from Elfheim must also be there. After all, beasts that don’t exist here do exist very commonly on other continents. It should be normal to use their knowledge to make a successful subjugation.

That's quite the happy thing indeed but it's weird why all of them haven't been taken down yet. Griffins move in pairs of male and female. They should know what this means as well though.

Looking at me making a confused face, the man looked at me as if he was looking at something weird.

"Sorry. You did well living even against a Griffin."(renji)

"Well, yeah. Wanna hear it all?"

"Maybe some other time."

I am interested but it looks like it'll be long so I refused. Tanned skin, gold hair, and a small scar beneath the eye. I have memorized his face so I can come talk to him whenever I need more info.

After that, I stood there for a few minutes waiting for my turn to come. When I finally stood in front of the counter, the man behind it glanced at my face, looked down towards the document, then instantly looked back up to me.

"Renji!?!"

"yo, looks like you're still doing well, Dagram."(renji)

The one who made the surprised voice was Dagram. I forget his real name but that's what everyone calls him here. Brown hair, thick beard, and tanned skin typical to those living in port cities. He's a lot shorter than me but he's make up

for it with width. And I don't mean that in the obese way either. That's how muscular he is.

A dwarf. Though a race that mainly focuses on iron and steel work, he's a weird one that instead works at a clerical job in a guild. And by the way, though he has such a dense beard, he's not much older than me. It's simply because he's a dwarf.

When his loud voice reverberated in the guild, almost all the gazes focused towards us.

"You bastard, where the hell have you been wandering around all this time?!?"(dagram)

And Dagram, while shouting, put a knee on the counter and held my collars with both hands. I know he's not actually serious but a dwarf's natural brute strength alone made my head sway making vision unstable.

"I heard you had disappeared and got so damn worried! You goddamn idiot!"

"Ahh, a, ah, a,....."

I tried replying but my head was spinning too much. Without realizing my state, he continued shaking me while shouting.

[Oi Dagram, Renji is.....]

"That voice, Ermenhilde, you're also here?"(dagram)

[Yeah, I am but.....]

“Seriously, this fool. As usual he’s making everyone around him so worried eh?”

[no, like I said, Dagram, Renji is.....]

And till my face started to go pale from sickness, he continued to shake me like that. No, I don’t mind him shaking me that much though, I did make him worry like this after all, and this exchange really was nostalgic.

By the way, it was Aya who saved me. Though, that first made him even more surprised which resulted in me being shook even harder but I digress.

And it was also fun to be part of the welcome that all the other adventurer joined in as well, but could you guys not urge me to drink when it’s still noon. Even I wouldn’t drink so early when in front of Aya. It’s bad education to the kids.....I’d drink if not in front of her though.

“Ueghh.....I feel sick.....”(renji)

“Sorry, sorry, but, it’s been two years already eh?”(dagram)

Looks like he was reflecting on what he did as he apologised while scratching his head in embarrassment. I am not really angry, in fact I’m feeling quite happy.



[Seriously.]

“Really, sorry. It was my bad. Okay?”(dagram)

“nah, I’m not angry. It’s fine.”(renji)

“I knew it. That’s the kind of guy you are Renji.”

This bastard, his attitude changed way too fast.

He hasn’t changed at all, even Aya, who was massaging my back gave a sigh.

“Aya, you have grown up as well.”(dagram)

“Dagram-san hasn’t changed at all though.”(aya)

“HA HA HA. Don’t you know dwarves don’t grow any bigger than this?”

“.....Not in that sense...”

She sighed again.

It’s too much to ask of Dagram to read between the lines. He’s the frank and impulsive type and is the type of guy who’d walk on the path he believes in at all costs. That’s why I have a favourable impression of him and it made me feel happy and nostalgic to see this kind of exchange again.

“So, these three are? Introduce us.”(dagram)

“yeah, The Elf is Feirona, the beastwoman is Mururu and that’s Solnea. We’re travelling together.”(renji)

“Ou! Feirona, Mururu and Solnea, is it?”

Dagram spoke those names again, as if making sure to remember them. It’s not like his memory is bad or anything, it’s just one of his habits.

“I am Dagram. As you can see, I’m a dwarf.”

With a sultry smile, the dwarf gave his intro making Aya make a troubled face. As usual, she doesn’t like it. And judging from how Utano-san and even Kudou have said they didn’t find it very special either, I’m guessing all women will probably not like it.

In fact even Mururu was sending glances towards me making a troubled face seeing it. She basically wants me to do something. As a man, I really don’t understand what’s the problem though.

“Oi, Dagram, stop with that smile that troubles every woman.”(renji)

“Shaddup! They aren’t saying anything right?”

He’s laughing heartily but, you know, that’s because they just don’t want to offend or hurt you, that’s all.

Even Utano-san becomes unable to say anything in front of his smile. I guess it's a woman thing.

"Also, Feirona, was it?"(dagram)

"ye, yeah."(elf)

Being called suddenly, Feirona replied in a surprised manner. In a rare occasion, even Feirona had been surprised by Dagram's smile. Since coming here, Feirona really has been getting surprised by a lot of things. It's pretty amusing and it should be good experience for Feirona as well. Well, I wonder if I am allowed to talk about experience to a man who has lived countless years more than me though.

"You, are you the type that's okay with dwarves?"(dagram)

"Hm? That's....."(elf)

"After all, there are elves that don't like dwarves right? Well, since you're Renji's companion, you should be fine I think....."

"Oh so that's what you meant. I don't mind it much."

"I see, I see."

And once more he gave that weird smile of his. I understand that he's happy but really, stop with that smile in front of women.

And on top of it, Aya, Mururu and even Feirona looked at me with a troubled face. Solnea, who remained expressionless as usual, instead looked surreal here.

While we were talking like that, a few drinks were brought to our table. I didn't order them so I'm guessing it's a treat. As I gave my thanks, the unfamiliar guild member gave a bow with a smile.

"Haven't seen her here before."(renji)

"Really?"

On my words, Dagram tilted his head in confusion. It's cute when a girl does it but when a muscular dwarf does it, it's just weird.

"That kid, you saved her long back."(dagram)

"is that so?"

Being told that, I turned to look towards the guild member as she went back to the counter. She looked around 20 yrs old or maybe slightly older. With blue hair tied up, her neck and ears could be seen from under her hair, making her look sexy. Her skin was tanned just right giving her a lively impression.

Dagram said that I saved her but I don't really remember. It might sound rude but, I ended up trying to recall her resting my chin on my fingers.....only to get elbowed by Aya.

“It’s rude to stare so much.”

“.....Sure.”

Like I said, why is her smile so scary? Since the start of this journey, I feel like she’s becoming more and more bold. Seeing that Dagram laughed out loud.

“What, already on a leash?”(dagram)

“Th, that’s not...”(aya)

“No need to say it, Aya. HA HA HA, looks like tonight drinks will be tasty, Renji!”

Aya hung her head from just those words. Seeing her like that Dagram’s voice became even louder.

“Feirona, do you drink?”(dagram)

“M, me?”(elf)

“No, as Renji’s comrade, I’m sure you can hold a drink or two.”

“In your head, what kind of criteria do you think I base my comrades on?”(renji)

What kind of thinking is that since he's my comrade he can drink? No well, Feirona is a good drinker though. He's better than even me.

"For the time being, leaving the talk about drinks aside. Dagram, tell me about these Griffins."(renji)

Turning the talk back to the important talk, everyone else gave a sigh of relief. Is his smile really that difficult to bear? The man himself refuses to realize that though.....no, at least Solnea doesn't mind it either.

"Griffin? The ones living in the mountain?"(dagram)

"yeah. I saw one before we entered Merdiora but, you guys haven't subjugated them yet?"

"About that..."

Monsters are subjugated. It's an obvious thing to do as adventurers. From what I've heard, a few Griffins have started living on the mountain but they have been successful in subjugating them as well. Then, why are they not wiping all of them off? Dagram's also an inhabitant of Elfheim. He should be well aware of their threat.

Realizing my expression, Dagram scratched his head as if it was difficult to say. After a small silence, I took a sip from the drinks prepared. By the way, mine and Dagram's drinks are filled with alcohol.

"Honestly speaking, we're troubled to decide what to do."(dagram)

“.....From what I heard before, you guys have been able to successfully take down a few right?”

“Well, it’s just a Griffin, anyone can do that as long as we have the numbers. Fortunately, there are quite a lot of adventurers with Griffin subjugation experience here as well.”

“Really?”

“It’s not a port city just for show. In the past one year, adventurers from Elfreim have increased a lot.”

That’s great. The level of monsters between Elfreim and Imnesia are completely different. If the very experienced adventurers from that side also came here, it’s a great plus for Imnesia.

I thought that but Dagmar was making a cloudy expression.....or rather, he looked troubled.

“What you saw was probably an Arch Griffin.”

Hohh, At those words, I released a long breath. Even Aya put a hand on her mouth from surprise. And Feirona and Mururu, had probably heard the name at least as they were shocked as well.

“I see. That is definitely something you can’t fight against easily.”(renji)

“We came to know about it only last night. Thanks to that one, only half of the team was able to return alive.”

“.....The guys here seemed quite happy even then though.”

“Those are the ones who didn’t see it. There were three Griffins nests at different areas. One of them turned out to be an Arch Griffin’s nest.”

Basically, the man I talked to before just happened to be lucky to have faced just the Griffin.

Arch Griffin. Though normally speaking they aren’t any different from normal Griffins. It’s just a term given to fully matured, very experienced griffins. But the one thing troublesome about demonic beasts was that the more they live, the stronger they get.

Griffins have the protection of Sylph, the wind spirit and as they grow older, they become skilful enough to draw power directly from the spirits. The protection that at an early age only protects them from basic arrows, can turn into an incredibly offensive attack, or make them fly even faster as they grow older. As an Arch Griffin, they are even able to use roars to blow away close opponents, or use high screams to disrupt the concentration of magicians *etc.*

They are a very troublesome opponent. It’s the kind of demonic beast that’s not common even in Elfheim—it only appears commonly in Abenelm.

“Why is an Arch griffin in Imnesia?”

Before I could say anything, Aya questioned Dagram. But the man only



shrugged at it.

“No idea. It appeared about ten days ago.”(dagram)

“What you mean you have no idea.....”

“Even if you say that, we just thought that it was a normal griffin at first. 10 days ago, there was a storm at sea so we thought these griffins might have been carried here by the storm.”

“But, something more was mixed with them.”

And when they approached it, it turned out to be more than just a Griffin, eh? Now that's.....It wouldn't have been just a nightmare for the ones that had to fight the Arch Griffin. It's not just bigger, but also ferocious. It uses not just its beak or talons, but also the power of Sylph to use spirit magic to attack.

Adventurers alone won't be enough, you'd need proper knights to kill one.

“Are there any survivors?”

“There's 2 getting medical treatment though they aren't in any shape to talk.”

“.....I see.”

I shouldn't even ask how many had gone. It's a miracle that there are survivors but the fact they can't even speak means that they're still in critical

condition.

“But still, even though such a monstrosity is so close, why is no one panicking?”

“That, well, first of all, only Elfreim inhabitants have realized that its an Arch Griffin and the info hasn’t been leaked outside the guild yet.”

I see. Looking at my surroundings, no one seemed to be interested in our talk and they didn’t react even when we talked about it. The people of this continent has never seen an Arch griffin and there’s likely no adventurer who knows how to deal with one. I can understand why only inhabitants of Elfreim know of it.

“Also, there are also Harpies and Goblins nearby. It’s not gonna be troubled to find things to eat.”(dagram)

That really is one single relief. Dagram muttered that. That’s true. Griffins are carnivores and if there are monsters nearby to them, they won’t come all the way to attack the city.

“What will you do about the subjugation?”(renji)

“Right now, we’re discussing it with the capital. I don’t really like it but we might have to get the help from the knights.”

“I see.”

Though this problem is beyond the power of just the guild to take care of alone, they still have their pride.

“if you need any help, just tell me.”(renji)

“.....you sure?”

“Only if there’s a need, okay?”

“Kuku, Sure, you’re the best, buddy.”

Saying that he struck at my back. It felt like getting hit by a wooden log.

[Why don’t we just go and kill it instead?]

Just then, Ermenhilde said something terrifying.

But even Aya seemed to be thinking the same as she looked at me. Feirona and Mururu just stayed silent, letting me decide.

“Thanks, Ermenhilde, Aya but you know, we can’t just depend on you heroes for each and everything, right?”(dagram)

“We don’t mind.....”(aya)

“Aya.”(renji)

I stopped Aya from saying anything.

The Guild has their own thinking. If they're discussing it with the capital, this info should reach Utano-san and O'brien-san as well. And those two know we're here as well. And they would either move the knights even while knowing that or they would officially send a request to us to subjugate it. The Arch griffin has a lot of prey around it. We don't have to rush it. We should wait to see their decision.

Aya can certainly take on an Arch Griffin but this is the Guild's job. First we must respect the guild's opinion in the matter. And if they send a request, we can accept it.

Even if we're the Heroes, we can't just rudely take control of someone else's job. Even if that means we have to stand back and watch. There are a lot of times you have to just be patient and endure it.

"Well, for a while, we'll be in Merdior. We can move whenever required."(renji)

"Thanks, really."(dagam)

"Well, you'll call us when the time comes anyway, I'm sure."(renji)

"Nah, I'll just have to ask you about the reward."

So basically you're agreeing that you'll call us eh? Hitting our cups together to

mark the end of difficult talk, we both gulped down our drinks.

“Puwaahh.”

“Why does alcohol taste so good after talking about problematic things I wonder.”

“I know, right.”

And, we both laughed together.

[So sultry.....]

Do you not understand the charm of that smile?

“please don’t start drinking from noon, Renji-san.”(aya)

“What, Aya, are you jealous that I took Renji from you?”(dagram)

“Looks like you’re already drunk Dagram-san.”(aya)

“.....Ou.”

Seeing Aya’s ‘smile’, Dagram groaned. And he leaned in towards my ear.

“Isn’t she starting to become more and more like Yuuko?”(dagram)

“Dagram, women become stronger the older they get.”(renji)

In a small voice, we both spoke.

[Is what he’s saying, Aya.]

“Renji-san, we’re heading to our inn. Right now.”

Well I knew she’d hear us. And I know she knew that I knew as well. Yet why did her voice sound so cold.

Mururu just wanted to get as far away from Dagram as possible and was already standing. Even Feirona was picking up his and Solnea’s things and was standing up. You guys, do you really hate Dagram’s weird smile that much?

“The inn, it’s the same one you stopped in back then?”(dagram)

“yeah.”

“I’ll come to invite you at night. We’ll go drinking.”

“Sure. I’ll be waiting.”

[Do you really not intend to lessen your drinking even a single bit?]

And as usual, Dagram gave his weird smile.

When I shrugged at Ermenhilde's words, at the same time Aya pulled at my mantle. Is this what they call being on a leash/dominated??

## Chapter 64: Merdior ③

“Renji, please wake up.”

While feeling someone shake my shoulder, I half-opened my eyes to see everything covered in black. I tried to make sense of what was going on but my mind didn't work. I tried closing my eyes and going back to sleep but my shoulder was still being shaken so that was impossible as well. Getting up while yawning, I saw Solnea's face. Looks like the blackness I saw before was her pitch black dress.

Last night, having a drinking bout with Dagram and others, I remember that I got cocky and drank more than I could handle but I don't remember anything else. While I was trying to suppress the headache from my hangover, Solnea called my name again. Was she perhaps worried to see me not speak anything even after getting up? But her voice was flat as always so I can't tell if she's actually feeling something.

“Yeah, thanks Solnea. I'm awake now.”

“I see.”

Looking around me, the place looked like a disaster scene with 'corpses' lying all around.

Last night, the number of people who took part in the drinking party were around 30. And all of them were people who had helped us when we had stayed in Merdior before. Humans, demihumans and beastmen. Without



minding any racial differences, everyone was lying flat on the ground or tables. In truth many more people had helped us than these but due to either being out away on a quest or having been unable to create time on such short notice, many had not been able to come.

.....And, it's been two years after that. There were some who had lost their lives against monsters as well. While mourning for their lives, we all spent the last enjoying our drinks. Everyone told me that rather than being sad, laughing was a better way to pay my respects to the departed ones. Really, they are so strong. The people of this world.

“Oh man, what a bad posture to sleep that is.”(renji)

While looking at the Hobbit lying on the ground, I spoke that.

Since I slept on the sofa, I was much more comfortable than these guys. As an Elf who didn't really hate dwarves, Feirona was instantly liked by every dwarf and was made to drink a lot alongside them as well I recalled. But I couldn't find him here on looking.

“Where's Feirona?”(renji)

“That side.”

Looking towards where Solnea was pointing, I saw him sleeping on a Sofa as well. Mururu was trying to wake him up but he didn't seem to budge.

My drowsiness is finally going away but the headache is still there. Looks like we all really drank a bit too much yesterday. I'm, glad I handed over Ermenhilde

to Aya before coming otherwise who knows how much she'd scold me if she saw me like this. Well, if Ermenhilde had been with me, I would have not gotten this wasted in the first place though.

But still, what should I do? Looking around the bar again, where should I even start? Even if I wanted to wake them up, most are still in sound sleep and the tables are littered with empty mugs and bottles. The floor was filled with sleeping dwarves and elves and beastmen. In a corner there were even empty barrels lying around; seriously, I can't even imagine how much did we drank..

Literally, this was like a painting of hell. Though we did indeed rent the whole bar, it'll take a whole day just to clean things up.

"Fuuaah.....Good morning, Solnea."(renji)

"Good morning, Renji."

She greeted me back, as usual, there was not even a slight movement in her expression as she looked up towards me.

"What's wrong?"(renji)

"No. I was wondering what will Renji do next?"

"I want to go back to sleep again.....is what I want to say, at least."

If I did that, god knows what Ermenhilde or Aya would say to me. I didn't even to think much to imagine them scolding me.

While Solnea stood near me silently, I yawned again. That's how dull my brain feels right now.

My throat felt dry so I picked up a nearby glass and brought it near only to smell a strong alcohol—probably Vodka—in it, making me frown. As a port city filled with many sailors, the alcohol found here was usually stronger than normal. When sailors can set out due to storms or something, it's normal for them to get drunk like hell so a suitable alcohol is prepared for them. I'm also pretty used to drinking strong liquor but comparing it with a dwarf's ability would be nothing less than suicide.

“What about breakfast?”(renji)

“Not yet. Aya said that we'll have breakfast here.”

And, she found us like this instead, is it?

Did she come here by her own will or did Aya tell her to come, in either case, I was saved. If Solnea hadn't come, I would have slept through till noon I'm sure.

“And, where's Aya?”

“Gone to call this person called ‘master’.” (T/N: Master is used for bar owners as well.)

As I got up from the sofa, my legs staggered a bit. And ended up slightly hitting Solnea who nearby.

“Ah, sorry.”(renji)

“No need.”

Looking outside the window, the sun was still rising up and it was still early morning.....well, a bit past that time to be honest. Opening the window, I let fresh air come in. The cold wind caressed my face and cooled down my drunk head. Taking a deep breath alone made me feel better.

“Did you have fun?”(sol)

“Hm?”

“Last night, I could hear laughing till very late at night.”

“ugh.....”

True, we did make quite a lot of ruckus. If they were sleeping in the inn next door, it's normal for the noise to reach them. Looks like, I'll get to hear about this from Aya and Mururu later as well.

Thinking that made feel a bit guilty probably because I was aware that we really did drink a bit too much I think. But I couldn't help it. After all, I was able to meet so many of my friends after a long time, that too in a world where death could come to anyone easily. Talking about our tales, it's normal to keep on drinking.....Now I'm making excuses like a drunkard as well.

“Now that I think about it, Solnea, have you ever drunk alcohol before?”

“No.”

“fuumu.”

Maybe I should recommend her that too one day. I thought of that as I shook the shoulder of an Elf I knew lying on the floor near me. But he only gave a groan and showed no signs of waking up. It was the same for the dwarf by him as well.

While I was worried over what should I do, the door of the bar opened. The ones who came in were Aya and the Bar owner.....he’s a mysterious man whose age and name were a secret. Now if it was hot beauty it’d be great but instead he’s a bald, tanned, muscular man.

And without really minding the disastrous scene inside his bar, he walked into the centre of the place. It showed that he was pretty used to such situations.....It’s amazing how anyone can get used to this.

“Ah, Renj-san, so you’re awake.”(aya)

Just when I was thinking whether she’d scold me or not, surprisingly Aya spoke brightly. Feeling like that was anticlimactic, I wanted to tsukkomi myself asking if I actually wanted to get scolded or something?

“Ah.....Morning, Aya.”(renji)

“Yes. Looks like you really had a great time last night eh?”

“Did you say that knowing the implication of your words?”

“??”

When I muttered that, she tilted her head wondering if she said something strange. Well, I guess she’s still too young to get such innuendos. If it was Koutarou here, he’d be grinning along with me.

While thinking of that, since I’ll get tired just standing, I sat down back on the sofa.

“Where’s Ermenhilde?”(renji)

“Ah, here.”

When I asked that, Aya brought out the medal from her pocket.

“Morning.”(renji)

[Good morning, you drunkard.]

And her voice was clearly displeased as expected unlike Aya or Solnea.

[Seriously. I’m not saying you shouldn’t drink but could you at least try to live more healthily for once?]

“O, ou.....”

[I understand that its good to get rid of the fatigue from a long journey as well but like this, you’d just end up getting sick instead you know? In the first place.....]

I see. So this why Aya didn’t say anything. While hearing Ermenhilde’s scolding I glanced at Aya to se her nod at Ermenhilde’s every word silently.

“Sorry, Ermenhilde.”(renji)

[.....What?]

“My head is really aching so stay quiet for now.”

[Houu.]

When I tried to make an appeal while pressing my head, her tone felt like it became even colder and deeper. But before Ermenhilde could start speaking again, the bar owner who was in the hall was standing behind Solnea before anyone realized. In his hand was frying pan and wooden ladle which he gave to Solnea.

“.....”

“Wake up everyone here.”(bar master)

Saying just that, he began to pick up the jugs and glasses from atop the tables. Being suddenly given such items, Solnea just stood there confused.

“What am I supposed to do?”(sol)

“Ah, you see..”(aya)

Saying that, Aya took both the items from Solnea with a smile. Honestly, I got a bad premonition.

“Oi, Aya stop——”(renji)

“You have to do this.”(aya)

And before I could stop her, she began to hammer the ladle on the pan making huge gonging sound.

“Okay everyone, it’s time to wake up!!!”

Still recovering from the hangover, that sound felt even more terrible as I blocked my ears while sitting on the sofa. It was the same for everyone else as well as they began to groan and moan from the sudden noise. With movements worse than a zombie’s, some began to finally move. But Aya wasn’t stopping there and decided to continue till everyone woke up. She’s the devil.

“Solnea-san, do you get it now?”(aya)



“I see. I understand.”(sol)

“Wait, Sol——”

In the end, in a matter of minutes, everyone was up while completely exhausted and senseless. And the bar master brought us water in the washed glasses and mugs. Gulping down the water, I felt like my headache became slightly better.

I wonder what she was thinking as Solnea looking at the frying pan and ladle constantly. May she had fun with it.

“My head hurts.”(renji)

“You get what you deserve.”(aya)

[You can play it more, Solnea.]

Looks like she really was angry as even Aya’s voice was cold. Also Ermenhilde, don’t say such terrible things out of nowhere. I stopped Solnea in a panic who was starting to put strength in her hands once again.

“fuu. What a bad experience…….”

While we were talking, Feirona came walking towards us. Looks like his head was aching from the sound as well as he was pressing his head with his hands. Mururu’s expression as she walked beside him was a worried, or rather, an

interested gaze.

“Morning, Feirona, Mururu.”

“yeah, morning.”(elf)

“Good morning, Renji.”(mururu)

Hearing him speak in a rare tired voice, I smiled bitterly as I stood up from the sofa. Looking around, I saw some of them had already begun cleaning up the place.

“Now then, we should start helping with the clean up as well.”(renji)

“Yeah.”(aya)

The women were in the kitchen washing stuff and the men were gathering all the plates and dishes from tables or clearing trash away. Once that was done, we arrange the breakfast prepared by the bar master and other who could cook on the tables. There were 30 of us here. Using almost half of the tables here, we started breakfast.

By the way, the food prepared was fish good for digestion and soups along with white bread. Since the alcohol was still in our system, this was perfect.

“Aya, Mururu, will this much be enough for you guys as well?”(renji)

“Eh?”(aya)

“Well, if you don’t eat properly you won’t grow you know?”

“Mind your own business!”(aya)

When I tried being considerate of her, I got scolded instead. And after that, I wonder what she was thinking as she was paying attention to her chest.....That wasn’t what I meant you know?

Mururu did seem to be not satisfied as she ahd already finished her soup and got more white bread from Feirona. Feirona, on the other hand, seemed to not have much of an appetite as he was just slowly drinking his soup.

“Say, Feirona, how much did you drink?”(Renji)

“Who knows. I don’t remember but I feel like I might have drunk at least half a barrel.”

“.....Wow.”

“What about you, Renji?”(elf)

“I think, I barely had about one third of a barrel.”(renji)

[Why the hell is your unit for measurement in barrels in the first place!?)

The tsukkomi from Ermenhilde was cold as well. As we both sighed, I sipped my soup silently. Haah.....it's tasty. Just when I was thinking that everyone else was also silent like us.....the dwarves had already begun to regain their energy as they started to ask for more bread and soup. Is their stomachs made of steel or something??

“Apparently this soup was made by Aya-jouchan you know?”(random guy)

“Really? By that kid who was once so clumsy?”

“Damn, this is better than what my wife makes.”

Hearing those voices, Aya was biting her bread happily. As expected, she's happy to have her cooking get praised like this. While feeling happy for her, I sipped my soup as well.

“yeah, this is tasty.”(renji)

“Really?”(aya)

“Yeah. Even though back then you didn't properly know how to hold a kitchen knife, you really have grown up well.”

“.....please forget that already.”

Hearing me, she hung her head in embarrassment. Laughs arose from other tables as well.

Back then, when once Merdiore was attacked by a huge monster army, we did prepare food in emergency with Toudou taking the lead but looks like everyone remembers that event very well even now. Well, since both Aya and Yui-chan were just kids back then, it was normal. After all, they were in middle school and elementary school at that time. It's normal to not be able to cook at that age.....or at least that was common sense in our world.

“Speaking of cooking. What about Yuuko’s skill, Renji?”

“Don’t ask. We don’t even talk about it.....”(renji)

“O, ohh....”

When I replied that to Dagram as he asked that laughingly, he shut up as if he realized something. All humans have something they are good at and things that they suck at.

[I did hear that now she can prepare at least roughly eatable food.]

“Only ‘roughly’?!?”

Someone reacted in a loud voice and everyone began to laugh. Utano-san.....can prepare food, probably. I think. Since she’s intelligent after all, though I wonder if that is a valid excuse. At least she has the eye to choose what’s good for your body. But, she ends up using only those ingredients or rather.....Yeah. The food she prepares is at least good for health. But the problem is the taste...

That things is understood by Toudou and others who ate Utano-san’s cooking

back then as well but still, that taste is.....Back in our world, she could somehow fix the taste with curry and stuff but that doesn't exist in this world. So what she chose was to make it spicy instead. I don't even want to remember any further.

"Renji."

"hm?"

Solnea who had been eaten her white bread spoke up. Looks like Ms Francesca and Feirona have properly taught her to not speak before finishing the food in your mouth.

"What will we do today?"(sol)

"Let's see.....do you want to do something is what I'd like to ask but it's not like you know what things there are to do here either."

"Yes."

Then maybe I should show her around the place? Yesterday we went to the port and the guild, maybe we should go to the various shops and stores in the commercial district today.

"Then we should tour the streets together. Feirona and Mururu, what will you two do?"(renji)

"I am going to go sleep at the inn, first and foremost."(elf)

Looks like his hangover is really bad. Seeing as he had been drinking with Dagram, I'm sure he actually did drink as much as he had said. Dwarves are race who can drink liquor like its water, you could say. While eating, before sleeping, it's normal for them to drink.

"Aya, what about you?"

"I'm thinking of going and greeting all the people who helped me back then here."(aya)

"Then, I'll also go with Renji."

"Got it. If I recall, both Kudou and Yuuichirou also live in Merdior right?"(renji)

"Yes. Rin-san in the commercial district and .....Enomiya-kun, probably in the residential district I think."(aya)

Ah but , Kudou's still in the capital I think. Though she might have returned by Utano-san's teleportation magic as well. I'll go show up there and return if she isn't there. And Yuuichirou was.....I wonder. After separating one year ago, I don't know what he's been doing since then. Utano-san said that I'd understand once I meet him.

Enomiya Yuuichirou. The same age as Aya and Souichi, he has the title of [Avenger], and is one of my comrades. He was once bullied as a child and has been trying to change desperately after coming to this world. He,well.....went through all sorts of trouble but I wonder if now he's energetic and lively.

“Going to meet Yuu?”

Hearing our talk, a fox eared beastman spoke up who was sitting beside us. He was probably bad with hot soup as he was cutely puffing at the soup trying to cool it down first. He’s a guy though.

“Hm, yeah. It’s been a year after all so I was thinking of properly meeting him again.”(renji)

“Then, he should be at the graveyard right now. Go there.”

“.....Why graveyard?”

Why did he say only that one place? I tilted my head but Aya nervously pulled at my sleeve.

“Celes-san was a resident of that district apparently.”(aya)

“Ah.....”

I see. Having forgot about it, I scratched my head ashamed of myself and took a bite off my bread silently. As I chewed down strongly, seeing me not act normally, both Feirona and Mururu looked confused.

Celes. Real name, Celestia Gernia. Former subordinate of O’Brien-san, even though young, she was a member of the Elite first Knight Order. During the Demon God subjugation journey, she travelled with us and took care of women’s mental care of our party as well. She was strong, kind and pretty.



Hearing her name, I recalled her face making me feel sad.

“I see.”

I finally understood why Yuuichirou had taken residence there as well. And this is probably why Utano-san didn't go deeper into the details about it.

“Then, I'll go there in the evening.”

“Yes. Then I'll go with you as well at that time. I want to talk with Enomiya-kun as well.”(aya)

“Then, we should meet up somewhere.”

When I said that, Aya nodded happily.

During the day, I'll give a tour to Mururu and Solnea and in the evening, I'll meet up with Aya and go meet Yuuichirou. I guess that settles the plan for today. Since Feirona will be resting at the inn, it'll be fine even if Ms Francesca came there asking for us. Well, he'd probably be dead asleep from the hangover though.

“Sure. How about the plaza at the centre?”(aya)

As its name would suggest, the plaza was at the centre of the whole city, had water fountain and was filled with stalls and stores. Since the fountain makes for a good landmark, it's a good place to meet up.

But the drunks here weren't going to let such an interesting topic get away. When Aya said that, everyone started talking excitedly.

"oh, going on a secret date?"

"That's a place where young couples gather, eh?"

"Just stay together the whole time."

"So the little girl will finally climb the steps to adulthood eh....."

"Oi Renji's is having a tryst with the little girl!!"

"Sh, shaddup! All of you!!"(aya)

Blushing madly, Aya shouted only to get more teased. Looks like the drunkards have fully recovered already. Well, their bodies aren't weak enough to get sick from a hangover of this level.

While sipping the soup, I dazedly gazed at them. Right now they're all so close to us but back then, they disliked us quite a lot or rather, were very cautious of us. Even if we had been summoned by the Goddess to kill the Demon god, to them who lived in the fear of demons and monsters, beings from another world were nothing familiar either. Where we lived, thought process, everything was different from us. And above all, even though resources were limited, we received more assistance and help. They didn't like that either.

Yet, right now, they were all drinking together with us, joking around, and

laughing along with us. Seeing Aya getting teased by them, it felt like all them treated Aya as their own daughter. You aren't a parent if you never tease your own child as she grows. It might only be a pain from Aya's perspective though. But still, she seemed to be having fun as well, or was it just my imagination.

"Renji."

"Hm?"

Feirona was pressing his head aching again probably from all the noise. And Mururu continued to eat as if all this wasn't related to her. Among that, Solnea who had been silent till now looked towards me and spoke.

"What's a tryst?"

"Da, do.....Don't ask about such things!"(aya)

".....Is it something bad that shouldn't be known?"(sol)

Solnea's confused voice and everyone's laughter overlapped. This, this is nice. I ended up smiling as well. Looking at me like that, Aya made a troubled face, then a shy face, then hung her down.

While I was looking at Aya whose emotions were changing every second,

"Feirona, what's a tryst?"

“Ask Renji.”(elf)

On top of his headache from the hangover, Feirona who got even tired from all the ruckus gave a bitter smile and said that.

## Chapter 65: Such Days Without Fighting ①

Just like the Magic City Ofan, Merdior was also divided into various districts. Business district, residential district, school district and the port area. In the residential area there was further division between the nobles' area and the general public, but there are also quite a lot of fishermen and sailors who've taken up residence near the port area as well. The buildings were built in a systematic grid pattern and at the centre was a park from where the main street went in all 4 directions making a cross.

Now then, as the name of the Commercial City would suggest, trade and commerce is prevalent here, mainly of fishes. Beyond the sea, from Elfheim as well, goods are brought in making it possible to get those items even faster than the Capital. And then there are also Elves here who can enchant weapons and items with magic. And even Dwarf blacksmiths who know how to use Mithril as well.

With sun at its highest, walking through the lively business district's main street, I yawned. I am awake properly but that doesn't mean the alcohol is completely out of my system yet. I did go and wash myself at the inn before going out but my head still feels heavy mostly because I still have a hangover.

"You okay?"

"Hm. Thanks for worrying, Mururu." (renji)

[Don't worry about him. It's just a hangover anyway.]

Unlike Mururu who was worriedly asked me that while looking up towards me, Ermenhilde's voice that resounded in my head was cold. Looks like she's still angry that I left her with Aya to go drinking.

I feel sorry, but isn't meeting my old friends important as well? Though I could have taken her with me as well. But sometimes it's fun to fool around with just all guys.

"Renji. What's that?"(sol)

As I walked while thinking that, Solnea lightly pulled at my mantle and pointed towards one of the items kept on one of the stalls.

Since telling her yesterday to ask me whenever she wants to know something, she's been questioning about everything she's been seeing today. It could be that even though she looked to be gazing at her surroundings indifferently, she might be curious about it inside.

"Oh, that is——"

Common items were rolled in cloth and lined up in that street stall, and the one Solnea was pointing at was a silver earring that was kept right in the centre of all the items. Due to the detailed structure, one might not notice but it also had very small gems inlaid in it. It's barely the size of my pinky finger but it clearly looked the most expensive among all the items in that stall.

"It's an ornament. You wear it on your ears."(renji)

Saying that, I looked towards the shopkeeper. Maybe because all of the items

were just ornaments, the shopkeeper was also wearing a lot of them. Maybe by showing them how the ornament looked while being actually worn was also to impress the customers I think.

When Solnea also turned towards her, the twenty -something shopkeeper raised her light brown hair to show her ears clearly. There, a gold earring slightly bigger than the one displayed was visible.

“I see. So that’s how its used.”(sol)

“It’s all for improving a woman’s appearance. See, even Mururu is using a ribbon on her right.”(renji)

“.....Renji, the way you said it was rude.”(mururu)

[Yeah, what do you mean ‘even Mururu’, huh?]

Giving but a shrug, I looked towards Solnea who seemed to be focused at the items. The shopkeeper was explaining a lot of things hoping she’d buy some but Solnea didn’t seem very interested in that. With her usual expressionless eyes, she continued to stare at the various ornaments kept.

“Want one?”(renji)

“No.”

I asked thinking she might be interested but she rejected it. At the same time, her gaze moved away from the ornaments as well.

The shopkeeper was the one who most surprised by her sudden actions. She looked at me as if hoping I'd buy something but if the person herself isn't interested. And above all, my purse doesn't have that big of a surplus either.

When I refused giving a forced smile, the shopkeeper also dropped her shoulders and gave up. Understanding that I really had no intention to buy, she also easily withdrew.

"If you want something, tell me okay?"

"I understand."

As I spoke that while walking away from the stall, she replied in her usual flat voice. Does she really understand though? I sighed, making her look towards me.

"Should I have bought it?"(sol)

"Nah, it's useless to buy something you're not interested in."(renji)

"I see."

When I said that, she replied while tilting her head. Since there was no change in expression on her face, it looked really surreal.

Having lost interest already, she faced forward and started walking again. Maybe because she wore an all black dress as well, her atmosphere felt really



cold but once you get used to it, it's not that bad. I'll just think of it as a part of her charm as well.

"Renji, that."

Next, Mururu pulled on my mantle and pointed towards a stall. There, they were selling grilled minced fish rolls. It was probably similar to grilled chicken. I couldn't tell from here but Mururu, who has a sensitive nose, might have smelled it from here.

When I looked at her with amazed eyes, she looked at me with upturned eyes as if pleading me. Even though she had such sleepy eyes till now, suddenly they are shining with excitement now.

"It looks tasty."

"I meant that for just Solnea you know?"(renji)

"I see."

[.....all you think about is food, isn't it?]

"I haven't eaten it yet so I'm interested."

Like I said, buy it with your own money then. Why are you telling me?

While I was thinking that, Mururu went and pulled Solnea's dress. Was it just my

imagination or was Mururu even more delicate with her than when pulling my mantle?

“Solnea.”(mururu)

“You’re right. Renji, what is that?”(sol)

“.....This isn’t fair.”(renji)

[Fufu. This is fun.]

When I dropped my shoulders, Ermenhilde laughed. Her voice sounded like she was really enjoying this as well so I could only silently walk to that stall along with everyone. It’s also troubling that even Solnea seemed like actually interested in it than anything else before.

“Food above all, is it?”(renji)

“What does that mean?”(mururu)

“Meaning that you both love food above everything else like ornaments etc.”

[You talking about yourself?]

“Hm.....It’s not a phrase really meant to be used on men though..”

I feel like I haven’t seen many situations where this phrase could apply. Also,

though I do think of food as important, my top most priority is sleeping.

While loosening the thread on my leather bag, which I use as a purse, and explaining about it to both of them, I bought two for each and bought an Orc meat one for myself. Well, it's stupid to be the only one to hold back after all.

"Don't leave and throw it okay?"(renji)

"Of course."(mururu)

[You look like a father of two children.]

"As if I'd want such big children already."

"Same.....Renji's a bit undisciplined to be one."(mururu)

[Not 'a bit' , he's very undisciplined in my opinion.]

Is this still because I was lying wasted from drinking this morning? Goddamn these two, saying anything they feel like.

Going silent for a while, we walked while eating when my mantle was pulled again and I stopped. And then I answered Solnea's questions. This cycle repeated quite a few times. And things that caught her interest ranged from ornaments like before, high exposure clothes being sold in shops, cosmetics *etc.* You can't call any of those necessary to live but yet they were costly, probably why it caught Solnea's interest.

Is she also as practical minded like I am I wonder. As a guy it doesn't really matter but is it okay for a woman to be like that as well? Well, in the first place it's doubtful whether Solnea has the necessary knowledge and awareness to make such decisions though.

I tried explaining all in a way that would make someone want to buy an item but it was in vain. While I was walking while thinking whether this was okay or not, my mantle was pulled again. Having already gotten used to this feeling in half a day, I turned to see Mururu point in a direction where a crowd had gathered. Seriously, I completely feel like a babysitter.

“Renji, what’s going on there?”(sol)

“A festival?”(mururu)

“I don’t think there’s anything to celebrate today though.”(renji)

The twenty-something people who had gathered were doing something inside a easy made tent. As we both went closer to it, a dry clacking sound came.

“Chess, eh?”(renji)

Peeking inside from above the crowd, I spoke what the people had been doing.

Chess.

A game common in our world, and something Kudou sold hugely in this world. It's pretty costly and rather than play chess, the people of this world preferred working on their farms more so I had heard that it hadn't become as popular though. Looking closely, some well dressed men were playing chess while sitting inside.

There were 5 chess tables. All 5 tables were filled with two players on each side focused in their game and then there were other round tables on which people were playing (trump) cards. Looks like by setting up a temporary tent, they have created something like a amusement centre.

“What's chess?”

“Ah.....hmm, how should I explain?”

Thinking of how to easily explain the game in simple terms, I stood there thinking for a few seconds.

“By moving those pieces one by one like that, it's a GAME.....game where they have to take out each other's pieces to win.” (T/N: he says 'game' in english first before switching back to the JP word.)

“Take out each other's pieces??”

“Ummm, you see, the pawns, knights and every other different pieces has its own speciality and features but———Seriously, how do I explain this.”

[Renji, can you play this as well?]

“yeah, I know the rules at least but.....”

[Then wouldn't it be better to show them by playing rather than just talking?]

“.....I guess so.”

That does sound easier and faster. When I asked one of the people watching the others play, it looks like many of the spectators didn't even actually know the complicated rules and were just passing time here because it was apparently still fun to see others play.

And, there were also many who slowly learned how to play by just by continuously watching. Well, that happens as well. That said, my knowledge of chess isn't more than what I have read on the internet out of curiosity. Since there was no one in my friends who played chess, I only played against the computer AI as well. And since I haven't done that in years now, it's all vague in my head. After a while, as I stood there, finally space opened up on one of the tables. When I asked the others to let me in, they happily let me go and play. Looks like since chess wasn't as popular yet, they were happy to see new players come and play.

“now then,”(renji)

Solnea sat down in front of me. After arranging my own pieces, I arranged Solnea's pieces as well and snapped my wrist a bit. Since we were new players, we drew attention of the crowd and quite a lot of people gathered around to watch. I don't like being put in front of such a crowd but since Solnea has shown interest, I'll work hard to have fun as well. That said, all I can do is teach the basics to her as well.

And by actually moving both mine and Solnea's pieces, I showed her how pawns, bishops, rooks etc worked and their characteristics. Moving the piece, taking down enemy pieces, and promoting pawns by taking it all the way to the enemy side. And, when the king falls, it's a loss. When I explained it all, she muttered, 'I see'.

"fumu."

The dry clacking sounds reached my ears.

We both were silent, and it was our third match now. That said, since in the first match I moved Solnea's pieces as well, and the second match was obviously my win.

Chess, in my opinion, depends on how much the opponent moves per your prediction. Reading moves ahead of time, you set a trap. So that the opponent moves according to what you plan and lead him directly into your trap. That said, I don't really get 'Reading dozens of steps into the future' that you see so many times in movies and internet.

In our world, Chess has existed for over hundreds and thousands of years and is also a sport, a show of strategy and tactics. Playing it like this, I truly get why it is so. I actually thought a lot as I tried to lead Solnea into a trap in the second match. And in the next match, Solnea tried to use the same tactic and I acted like I was getting fooled while setting a trap of my own. That said, since this we're both amateurs, I doubt it actually looks like some refined trap to those watching.

But it was enough to defeat Solnea who was also an amateur. As expected, I

won the third match as well.

“It is my loss.”(solnea)

“I am the one teaching you after all. I won’t lose that easily.”(renji)

That said, I don’t really have anything more to teach her. She’s really smart. She has really sharp observation. She understood the tricks I used and also learned to prepare a counter against it very well. And in the end, it’s not like I’d have much to teach considering what I have is not more than half assed knowledge I looked up on the net in my spare time. In that sense, it’s amazing how she memorized how every piece moved from just hearing it once.

I guess this what they call talent? Or was this her intellect she possessed from being a descendant of the Demon God? Well, in the end—Solnea, as she calmly and silently played chess, looked really beautiful. While we were playing, the men watching us for mostly focused on Solnea instead.

“I see.”(sol)

“So, did you enjoy it?”

“Yes. This is difficult to win just from tracing someone else’s movements.”

Saying that, she arranged her pieces again. Her actions were slow and there was no emotion on her face but, she’s enjoying this, right?

“Can we play one more time?”(sol)



“Before that, why don’t you try playing against someone else first.”(renji)

Saying that I left my seat and a different man took my place. With curly gold hair, he was clearly a noble. Even though it was their first time meeting, he greeted Solnea with a smile as he arranged his pieces.

This is a bit different than I imagined but to interact with other people like this should be good for her. Solnea’s ‘world’ was a bit too small right now. WE, who are travelling with her, my friends I introduced in Merdiore, and Utano-san who she met in the capital are all she has to call as acquaintances. It should be good experience for her to talk with other people like this as well.

But Solnea herself didn’t seem to like that as she stared at me who had stood up. In her eyes, I felt like I sensed very minute sense of bewilderment. I really must be a bully as seeing that, I only felt happy.

“Well, Mururu seemed bored as well after all.”(renji)

“Un.”

Turning aside her gaze, I turned towards Mururu who was sitting on the table to the side. I doubt she actually understood my intention but she was probably bored of chess already anyway as she was flailing her legs looking really bored.

I went and slightly kneeled in front of her.

“I’m going to buy us something to drink so, you want anything?”(Renji)

“I’ll go buy it instead.”

When I spoke, Mururu energetically jumped off the table. She really must be happy to get to move her body again as her wolf tail was swaying around. I guess I should let her move around then. Giving a wry smile I gave her a bag filled with a few copper and gold coins.

“Buy something for me and Solnea as well.”(renji)

“Okay.”

“And don’t waste the money uselessly, okay?”

“.....okay.”

While realizing the time it took to reply that, I didn’t say anything further and let her go. Well, I doubt she’d get lost either. This place pretty easy to find and not to mention, Mururu’s nose and senses are incredible.

After seeing Mururu off, I turned back towards Solnea’s table. Since it was her first time facing an opponent other than me, she seemed to be having trouble. Her placid sea-like expression was the same as always but her opponent didn’t use the same type of moves as me. She seemed to be trying to lead her opponent but it seems her opponent understood that so it looked like she was the one getting lead on by her opponent. The man didn’t seem to hesitate before playing his move. Strong.....or rather, he’s pretty experienced in playing chess probably.

From what I’ve heard, Chess has become a good pastime for the nobles.

There aren't any tournaments or matches like in our world and neither can you earn money if you're good at chess in this world either. So, most people would obviously prefer to work on their fields rather than waste time at chess. Thus, it got popular with the second and third sons of nobles who have a lot of free time. I'm sure this man is also of that type.

[It's so weird.]

"Hm?"

[The Demon God is surrounded by people right now.]

Due to Ermenhilde's sudden words, I almost burst out.

Everyone looked at me weirdly for a second but soon turned back towards the chess board as the next move was made.

"It's not like that."

[.....fuun]

Solnea isn't Nayfell. Was it because she has no memories or was it because her personality was simply different? In either case, she's different from Nayfell with whom, conversing itself was useless. I think so.....I want to believe so.

She might not be AStraera, but I wish Solnea also learns to love people. Feirona, Ms Francesca, Mururu. And not just them, but a lot more people as well.

In the end, Solnea lost that match as well, and a different man came to play. Chess gives the image of being a mentally tiring game but is Solnea fine?

In the meantime, Mururu returned back with two drinks in her hands and a fish stick in her mouth.

“What’s that in your mouth?”(renji)

“Nafingg”(mururu)

[Talk after you’re done eating at least.]

As usual, this girl does what she wants.

.

.

.

After that, getting enthusiastically invited by that blond man and after having multiple matches, by the time we left it was already noon.

“Aren’t you tired?”(renji)

“No. Not at all.”(sol)

Solnea also sounded slightly regretful as she walked up alongside me. Mururu, on the other hand, in the time Solnea kept playing, she went around various food stalls, trying all of them out. Even her stomach seemed to be slightly bulging right now.

.....I didn't check, but seriously how much did she eat?

“Also Mururu, tomorrow we'll go do some jobs, okay?”(renji)

“I know.”

[That's right, working for the amount you've eaten is truly how adventurers work.]

“un.”

Looks like she herself knew that she had eaten a bit too much as she spoke slightly embarrassed. Should I consider this laudable or should I think that she had it coming?

That said, the purse I gave her hasn't become that light so she did restrain herself a bit. I'll think of it that way. I'll still have her work for what she ate though.

“Solnea, did you enjoy chess?”(renji)

“I am not sure.”(sol)

She spoke in her usual flat voice but from what I’ve seen from her talking to others, she probably did find it fun at least a bit. Whether for better or worse, Solnea who didn’t talk much was surrounded by a lot of people and had to converse with them as well. Now am I being just meddlesome or is this also considered parental affection? Well, the latter would only invite all sorts of misunderstandings though.

“I see.”(renji)

“Renji did you.....”(sol)

“Hm?”

While I was looking at the slight inflated Mururu, Solnea spoke up. Without actually turning towards her, I only inclined my head to hear her.

“Did you enjoy, chess?”(sol)

“Yeah.”

I gave an immediate reply. Though this was the first time actually playing it against someone other than on the internet, it was pretty fun. It’s pretty fun to mingle with so many people and get excited about something.

Well, that said, I am definitely the type who prefers to move around his body more. Maybe because I used my head and concentrated a lot more than

normal, I feel really tired.

.....Even though I don't want to consider myself as a muscle-head.

"I see."

"Maybe we should play again sometime?"(renji)

"If Renji wants to."

As usual, she won't show her own will. But I still felt like there was some progress as I felt a slight wave of emotion in her.

"But still, Mururu, how much did you eat?"(renji)

".....A lot?"(mururu)

[What exactly do you mean by 'a lot' is what we want to know though.]

She maybe realized that I was string at her stomach as she gave a slight glare towards me.

When I laughed at that, she punched at my thigh very lightly. Since it didn't hurt, I ended up laughing even more.

[What the hell are you two doing, seriously.]

While hearing her fed up voice as usual, we entered one of the bigger item shops on the main street. The items kept were not in any way inferior to the ones in the capital.....in fact, it might be even better.

“Renji, do you want to buy something?”

“Hm, yeah, a little something.”

Since every item had been divided perfectly by type and use, it was easy to find what I wanted. A chessboard and pieces. Finding it more costly than I expected, I hesitated a bit but in the end I decided to ignore it.....there were quite a lot of types but the one in the middle, and its price, was suitable for me.

“.....Renji wants to play chess as well?”

“Well, yeah. If we have this, Solnea won’t get bored either right?”

Me and Mururu like to move around, and enjoy scenery more, but Solnea’s chain of emotions was more difficult to understand. Then, I hope she can enjoy something like chess since she did show interest. I doubt there’d be anyone who plays chess in Elfreim but she can enjoy it while we’re in Merdior after all.

“Maybe you should play it as well if Ms Francesca comes to meet?”(renji)

“Fran plays chess as well?”

“I’m not sure. But it did seem popular with nobles after all.”



“fuun.”

Looks like Mururu really isn't very interested. Well, I already understood that since she resembles me in that sense. Feirona.....I think he'll be good at it if he learns once. Or rather, I feel like he'd instantly get better than even me.

“Here.”(renji)

“Is this okay?”(sol)

“Well you didn't want anything for yourself so.”

After buying that we left the item shop and I handed it, and the bag it was given to us in, over to Solnea. Even if she shows interest, she won't ask for it. That only happens for food. Really, food beats everything eh. I wish that she'd take after Aya or Ms Francesca more than Mururu though.

With this, maybe she's learn some more womanly emotions.....well, there's nothing womanly about chess though. I feel like the gift might have its own type of trouble as well.

“Thank you very much.”(sol)

[Don't mind it. Renji's way too kind to every woman after all.]

“Could you please stop with such easily misunderstood words already?”

To Ermenhilde's sudden words, I ended up speaking like that.

Now then, after getting lunch, where should we head next?

"Or rather, Mururu, can you even eat lunch now?" (renji)

[You don't have to force yourself to eat, okay?]

"I'll be fine, I think."

When we spoke in amazed voices, Mururu spoke that confidently. Well, if she's like this, I doubt she'd be 'forcing' herself to eat.

Looking back to make sure that Solnea was still silently walking with us and had not gotten lost, she was holding the chess bag close to her chest as if precious. It doesn't look like she's holding it too tight to break it.

Her face is expressionless as always though.

## Chapter 66: Such Days Without Fighting ②

The sun had begun to set. Under the dusk coloured sky, sitting on a bench in the central park, I shivered from the cold.

The cold here isn't as severe as in Japan but it was still winter right now. It's still pretty cold.

I tried to bear the cold by covering myself with my mantle but it didn't seem to be very effective. If it was going to be like this, I should have kept at least Mururu or Solnea with me. After all, it would have been much warmer if even a single person was with you. You can also talk with them, and walk with them.

As I sighed feeling lonely after separating from my comrades, who had been with me till a while ago, a voice resounded in my head.

[Why are you sighing now?]

"Nothing. It's just so cold."

[Well, it's winter after all.]

That's all my partner said. I wish she'd try to keep the conversation going a bit more.

That's very like her but it also made me feel cold and ,lonely again. I know

these are such cheap troubles but I can't do anything about it either.

While sitting on the bench, I began observing the people passing by. Kids with their parents, or lovers, holding arms with each other, an old couple, young brothers, and men who were waiting for someone, like me. Everyone were laughing, worrying about what to eat for dinner, hurrying back home; everyone had a different expression.

While I continued gazing at this wave of people, a familiar person walked towards me from the crowd. And due to the cold wind, she was holding her robe close to her body and holding down her hair from swaying too much. She looked to be even colder than me.

“Sorry, did I make you wait too long?”(aya)

“Nah, I got here just a while ago as well.”

[Really?]

Ermenhilde destroyed my try to make a normal greeting instantly. Even Aya looked at me with a difficult to explain expression. Since Aya was pretty tall, and I was sitting, she was looking down towards me making it all the more awkward.

Hmm, making such a voice I stretched my stiffened body only to see Aya start laughing.

“What?”(renji)

“It’s nothing, don’t worry.”(aya)

She said that but her expression seemed to be really cheerful and happy, and due to my partner who can still never read the mood, I dropped my shoulders feeling slightly embarrassed. Maybe she noticed my feelings as Aya cleared her throat and combed back her slightly disarrayed hair due to the wind.

“Well then, let’s go, shall we?”(aya)

“Hm? Ah, yeah.”

Even as I stood up, once again, It really is cold, eh? I spoke up

When I said that, she agreed and started walking beside me. A few gazes gathered towards us inside the park. And every gaze was that of a young man, because that’s how attractive Aya’s appearance was.

“So, has Rin-san returned already?”

“Kudou? Nah, her house was locked.”

I recalled the house made of stone and concrete. It was on a whole different scale, making me feel amazed at how she didn’t mind living there. She didn’t even try to slightly blend in with the surroundings like Toudou’s restaurant. It was clearly a house from a different world.

“.....You sure she wasn’t just asleep?”(aya)

“No, Mururu said that she couldn’t sense any human presence, so it must be true.”

“fuumu, I see.”

[What, did you need Rin for something?]

‘Ah, yeah. Well not really. I was hoping we could get her help for the Griffin subjugation as well.”(aya)

For something she spoke so casually, the matter wasn’t that simple. It’s not something you should be talking about at a perfect date spot and in the evening, right? Well, I’d be troubled if she started talking about romantic things as well though.

“What, did you accept a request or something?”(renji)

“No, not really but I was hoping to prepare beforehand so we could move as soon as the request comes.”

[.....Right, Aya is really diligent after all.]

It’s almost as if you’re implying that a certain someone isn’t diligent in his work? Well, not that I actually think of myself to be diligent though.

Dagram was the one gathering the necessary people required but true, it’d be more relaxing if Kudou was here as well. Even as the [Item Creator], she has

more physical ability than me and is also good at making decisions on the fly. She'd be fine even when fighting on the front lines against an Arch Griffin. But then, I'd totally look like nothing more than a burden though.

But I guess that's usual as well. How sad, or should I say, pathetic. Even though I have already abandoned any hopes to actually be a Hero, I still can't let Aya or Kudou fight alone.

"A Griffin likes corpses of animals and.....what was it, it was a weird named grass."

I should ask Feirona and other elves and Dwarves in Merdior about it. Since Griffins have a good nose, you can lure a Griffin with the smell of blood and that peculiar grass. It'd be easy to get it trapped as well. Since it's a bird, it's also easier to take one in the dark as well. While recalling the methods of dealing with Griffins I had been taught, I decided to be of use by using my brains more.

"Oh right, where are Mururu and others?"(aya)

"I had them both go back to the inn."

"Is that so? I thought it'd be fine to introduce them to Enomiya-kun as well."

[Yeah, but Renji bought Solnea a chess board so they had to go back.]

"Eh? Chess?"

Why are they related? Aya tilted her head in confusion.

“Ah, I had her play chess during noon and she seemed to be interested in it so I bought her a set due to which she became interested in playing it with Ms Francesca as well.”(renji)

While I was giving her a tour, she asked me multiple times if Ms Francesca would come to the inn or not. Still without any expression though.

She never directly said that she wanted to play but I’m pretty sure that was what she meant. It probably was not my imagination that her footsteps looked light as she walked back towards the inn with Mururu.

“Oh is that so...”(aya)

I didn’t do it without any intent behind it that could make me feel guilty and purely out of good will, hoping she could truly enjoy this world, but Aya didn’t seem very convinced. Well, I know she isn’t that narrow minded but somehow her words still felt a bit cold. Or could it be? That she was anxious that I gave only Solnea a present? Looking at her, she was looking at me suspicious half open eyes. Even her walking speed rose and it ended with me walking slightly behind her. The setting sun cast a shadow behind her as she walked with her hair swaying at every step she took. It looked so much like a good painting that I wondered how many people were there in the world who had such a disposition.

“I want her to come to like humans and learn to enjoy all sorts of things, you know?”(renji)

“Fuun. Oh really?”



To my excuse, Aya replied without turning back towards me. I'm sure she was pouting right now. As she walked while joining her arms near her waist, she really looked like a sulking child. While finding it pleasant, I thought of how to fix her mood.

Now if this was Mururu or Solnea, buying a skewered grilled meat would suffice though. While thinking of such rude things, I continued walking.

[If you're going to meet Yuuichirou, how about buying at least a few flowers first?]

"yeah, you're right."

Since we were in a great date spot, there quite a few flower vendors in view. She heard Eremenhidle as well as Aya stood beside me silently and looked at the flowers. Looks like even if the world is different, it's still common sense to give flowers to your lover or offering some at a person's grave. In Japan though we use chrysanthemum but in this world, they tie small lovely white flowers together in a bundle when leaving some at a grave. Since white was close to silver, and silver was the symbol of the Goddess, it was meant to lead the souls of the dead to the Goddess apparently. Getting a bundle of flowers from the florist, I paid the expenses.

After finishing buying, the florist looked at me and Aya with a knowing gaze. She must be letting her imagination run wild in his head I guess. The florist was young girl after all. She must really enjoy love talk. Looks like that doesn't change in any world as well.

"Now then, we got this as well, let's get going."(renji)

“Yes.”

It really must be my imagination that her voice still sounded flat.

Did she want some flowers as well? I thought but to travellers like us, flowers don't have much meaning. Even if you decorate it somewhere, you don't know when you might have to leave again after all. And for the same reason, it's useless trying to grow some by yourself as well. But still wanting flowers is, I guess, what makes her a woman. In our previous world, giving flowers as a gift might be acceptable but in this world, gifts to an adventurer need to be more practical and pragmatic.....or am I the only one who thinks that?

While gazing at Aya who was walking slightly ahead of me while sulking, I ended up smiling. It's very adorable to see her like this when she's usually more Adult-like, or maybe this was more like her. In any case, I prefer this Aya more I think.

“Aya, don't sulk so much.”

“I'm not really sulking or anything.”

I am sure she enjoys such time as well. She was pouting as if angry but her voice sounded really happy.

Adventurer. Monster hunts. After getting summoned here, she received inhumane power and abilities. Yet, we still don't know when we might die. We never think that we'll die, living our life till the very end of our life span and it's doubtful that we'd get to die happily lying on a bed. That's why, such small

things are so precious to both me and Aya.

[You two sure get along well.]

“When Eru says it, it feels more like sarcasm though.”(aya)

She turned around to say that but her lips were still pouting but her expression looked more fed up than angry. This’d be fine if Ermenhilde had an actual body, but she’s just a medal. I end up as the one taking her gaze.

“You were with Renji-san alone for a whole year after all.”(aya)

[I felt more like a babysitter though.]

I had no words for my partner who replied with that instantly. I don’t recall causing so much trouble but, it must be true if she says it. Looking at me blankly for a second, Aya burst into laughter. Seeing her smile warmed my heart and even though I had been just told something heartless by my partner, I still ended up smiling.

“I told you when we were travelling to Merdior as well but I really did spend the last one year just relaxing after all.”(renji)

“But that’s fine, isn’t it? As long as we can talk and laugh like this. Even though we may still be very far from true peace, it’s still a peaceful time right now.”(aya)

“.....I guess so.”

I didn't deny her. I just couldn't.

Because I feel the same. As long as we can laugh, while relaxing like this, I'm sure, that's the happiest thing to ever exist.

Without the threat of monsters, demons or the Demon God, if I could travel around this beautiful and rich world,—I'm sure that was what Eru's wish was as well.

That's why, when I also laughed at her words, Aya looked at me blankly again. And then gave a truly happy smile. As we continued walking while talking like that, the crowd became slowly lesser and lesser. The number of buildings also reduced and instead, barren trees with leaves fallen on the ground as per the season came more and more into our view. Along the side of the path, which was most probably a flower bed, there were no flowers growing right now. This path with only withered trees around gave a quite desolate feeling.

Going further ahead, we reached a place surrounded by an iron fence.

Probably because this place was at a point even higher than the residential area, you could clearly see the sea from here. It was a cemetery truly fitting one that would exist in a port town, you could say. It wasn't that big and the number of graves were less than even hundred. Rarely is a body left intact after losing to a monster and most of the times, that body is often taken away by the monsters as food anyway. There are many cases where not a single piece of body is found and you have to treat them as missing. But, after a battle.....if you can't find someone even after a few days, the chances of them actually living are considered very low. Such corpse-less individuals only have their names carved on the gravestone.

“It should be obvious but, it’s such a melancholic place.”

“I know.”

Answering Aya’s mutterings, I saw a figure standing at the cemetery gates. Thinking it might be Yuuichirou, I looked at the figure but their height was shorter than Yuuichirou’s. It’s been a year since I’ve seen him but I’m sure he was at least 170cm but the figure in front of me was maybe even lesser than 160cm from what I could tell.

For someone who came to visit a grave, it’s weird that the person is standing at the gates. Were they waiting for someone? Thinking that we walked closer when the person gave a bow. Reflexively both me and Aya did the same as well but I didn’t sense much friendliness from the person. Just a formal greeting. With dark purple semi-long hair and a dignified expression that felt somewhat cold, she was wearing a tunic and a ankle-length long skirt. As we headed into the cemetery while I confirmed her appearance with a sidelong glance, my side got elbowed.

“Mouu.”(aya)

“What, I was just confirming who that was!”(renji)

[Oh I wonder about that.]

How much o they distrust my relationship with women? Oniisan will get really sad, you know?

While talking stupidly inside my head, we headed inside the cemetery. Knee high graves had been made in a uniform pattern and all were very well maintained as well. And as if surrounded by the numerous stone graves, under the setting sun, a single man dressed in all black was holding something like a long broom stick and was cleaning a grave. Even though the sun's setting, he really must be a zealous man. And in front of him was a big grave. Bigger than both me and the black clothed man, it was a grave meant for all the ones who didn't have a corpse and the black clothed man seemed to be just staring at the grave in a daze.



“Yo, Yuuichirou.”(renji)

To the black clothed man's back, I called out. His clothes were black, the long coat he was wearing was also black. And his boots and gloves as well. Even his tanned skin looked on the blacker under the setting sun. And among all this black, only his grayish hair stood out. In the past one year, his hair really have grown a lot. It was long before as well but right now its as long as a woman, while tied very simply behind his back. But his body looked much smaller than even us. The reason was Yuuichirou's left arm. He didn't have one. In a battle long ago, he had completely lost it. The empty sleeve swayed in the wind.

Reacting to my voice, the man turned around. He really must have grown accustomed to living peacefully in Merdiore as he didn't sense even after we came so close to him. It's something that would have been unimaginable before.

"Ah."

With a slightly surprised voice, his violet eyes opened slightly wide.

"Huh? Yamada-san and Aya-chan, why are you guys here?"(yuu)

And with a leisurely, almost stupid sounding voice, he tilted his head in confusion.

"Long time no see Yuuichirou. We are on a journey and have made a stop here. How are you? Been doing well?"(renji)

"It's been a long time, Enomiya-kun."(aya)

"Un. Yeah, it's been a long time both of you. You two seem to be doing well as



well.”(yuu)

“Yeah.”

With a smile, he gave his greetings as well. That gesture of his looked much more mature than a year ago.

“Have you been visiting the grave everyday?”(renji)

“No way, not everyday. Right now, I come only once a week.”(yuu)

“.....I see.”



Saying that, I stood beside Yuuichirou and placed the yellow flowers we bought a while ago. As I joined my hands to pay respects, Yuuichirou gave his thanks.

Here lie everyone of those who had no corpse left to bury. People attacked by monsters, adventurers who never returned after going on a job. And travellers who got lost forever mid journey. Among those, Yuuichirou's lover, Celestia-san was also included. She travelled with us, and died. And we.....couldn't bring her body back with us.

"But still, it's rare to see both of you together here like this. Did something happen?"(yuu)

"About that, let's talk about it later in detail Enomiya-kun."(aya)

"Sure. How's Souichi?"(yuu)

"Way too energetic. Renji-san is the same as well."(aya)

[umu. He was staring at women even at the cemetery entrance.]

Even though we met after such a long time, is that really what you want to talk about? Yuuichirou laughed seeing getting slammed by both Aya and Ermenhilde.

And after some time passed with me getting teased like that, Yuuichirou took deep breathes to stop himself from laughing too much.

"Are you guys in Merdior for a while?"(yuu)

"Yeah. We'll be heading to Elfheim soon though."(renji)

“I see.”

By the time we stopped talking, the sky had already gotten quite dark. The air became colder and Aya shrugged from the cold.

Looking at her, both me and yuuichirou exchanged glances.

“Well then, I’ll come see you guys next time.”(yuu)

“Don’t mind it. We’re totally free so we’ll come again.”(renji)

“Sure. Next time, let’s properly sit down and talk.”(yuu)

[Yeah, that sounds nice.]

Another cold wind blew. Aya’s robe and skirt blew up and she gave a small shriek.

Since we’re close to the sea, the wind is pretty strong here. I think in summers the wind would feel really nice. And the scenery is incredible as well. Though I doubt the cemetery is a good place to be enjoying the scenery.

“Now that I think about it, it’s rare to see you two alone with each other like this.”(yuu)

“Hmm?”

Was it really?

Being told that, I tilted my head in confusion. I recall quite a lot of instances where I was alone with her though? During the journey, we did spend a lot of time as night guards together. We went buying stuff together many times as well. Well, I think what he means is probably it's rare since Aya became more conscious of me. Back then, I think she didn't really mind the differences between men and women.

"Well, I guess."(aya)

Before I could say anything, Aya spoke that puffing her chest with pride. Even though she was blushing like crazy when getting teased by those drunks about this, she seemed fine when Yuuichirou says the same thing. In a way, she's gotten used to it perhaps?

After a slight gap of silence, Ahem, I cleared my throat. Well that doesn't mean she doesn't get embarrassed anymore. Unlike her previous pure smile, her current proud expression looked really amusing.

.....when I thought that, Aya stomped on my foot. Since it didn't hurt I guess she held back. And Yuuichirou laughed again. Seeing him like that, it feels like he's laughing a lot more as compared to a year ago. And he also seemed to have gotten used to laughing as well. And it's not a deceiving or secretive smile either, it's simply a bright pure smile.

Recalling Celestia-san, his thoughts always seemed to go towards the negative. But still if he can laugh like this right now, looks like he's settled matters with his heart as well. Or maybe he's trying to move on ahead. Aya also

gave a laugh and wiped the tears welling in her eyes. Those tears are probably not because of laughing too much but due to being happy to see Yuuichirou laughing happily like this.

At that moment, a rustling sound came to us.

“Yuuichirou-san.”

Before I could turn to look, a calm voice came to us. Looking towards the source of the voice, the woman who had been standing at the entrance of the cemetery was standing there silently.

“Cela-san.”(yuu)

Calling her name, Yuuichirou gave a curt bow. So her name is Cela.

I looked towards Yuuichirou asking to introduce us when Yuuichirou's expression was not the cheerful one from before, instead he was giving a more mature looking smile. And then, he walked towards her side. And she didn't seem to mind that as if it was a very natural action. In fact, she seemed to step in a little closer to Yuuichirou.

“This is Seravi Gernia. Celes-san's younger sister.”(yuu)

“.....Nice to meet you.”

And she gave a bow again. Seeing her, both me and Aya exchanged glances for a second.

I had never heard of her having a younger sister and she seemed very different from Celestia-san as well. Celestia-san was lively, vigorous, always leading and pulling us along with her. But her younger sister standing in front of us seemed silent and slightly gloomy. Maybe that made her expression look slightly dark as well. It might sound really rude, but she was nothing like her older sister.

Since Celestia-san always left such a strong impression, I ended up comparing the two. I do feel that it's bad of me to do that and I know it's very normal for sisters to have completely opposite personalities.

“We are currently living together.”(yuu)

But the next words made my heart almost jump out from surprise.

“What?”

I was lost for words and Aya looked at Yuuichirou with a black expression.

The boy called Yuuichirou is a very quiet and calm boy. Introverted, he rarely speaks up his own thoughts. It might sound bad but he's the type that gets flown around by his surroundings.....that's the kind of boy he is.

He would sometimes agree with someone even though he's of the completely opposite opinion and then would get stressed about it as well. And the one who encouraged and lifted him up was Celestia-san and Yuuichirou was captivated by her and worked hard to change so that she might come to like him as well.

And hearing that he was now living with Celestia-san's younger sister honestly surprised me. It's not like falling in love again is bad or anything. In fact, I feel like really supporting him if he's trying to move ahead.

But, I always thought that Yuuichirou preferred lively women like Celestia-san that's all. Also, there's also a rude part of me thinking that he was a late bloomer.

"Nice to meet you, Seravi-san. My name is Renji Yamada."

"Oh my, how very polite of you. I'm Seravi Gernia. Yuuichirou has told me a lot about you."

"Eh, um, Nice to meet you as well, I'm Aya Fuyou."

Greeting each other, we three gave a bow. It might look really surreal from Yuuichirou's point of view who was still standing.

"Are you done with your work and talk?"(sera)

"Un. Sorry to have kept you waiting Sera-san. What will you two be doing? If you like, we can take dinner together....."(yuu)

"Ah, no, no. We'll pass for today. Right, Renji-san?"(aya)

"I guess. Yeah."(renji)



“Really? Then since you’re in Merdior, we’ll invite you again some other time. Then, let’s go home, shall we Sera-san?”(yuu)

“Yes.”

Saying that, both of them gave a bow to us, who stood there stiff, and left together. She stood to the left of Yuuichirou and seemed to walk as if supporting his now nonexistent left arm.

.....Seriously?

“Renji-san, did you know?”(aya)

“Nope, I didn’t.”

I pinched my cheek but yeah, it hurts. This isn’t a dream.

In this world women have a strong sense of virtue and it’s almost taboo for a woman to show her skin before marriage. It was the same for cohabitation as two people who were neither family nor children living together would be seen by the society as having ‘that kind’ of relationship.

And since it’s not just Yuuichirou who is from our world, and also a woman who is originally from this world.....i’m pretty sure they are in that kind of relationship. The one between man and woman.

It’s a happy thing to be honest but the fact that none of us knew that made it complicated. He could have told us beforehand geez.

Well, in this world where there's no internet or phones, it could take months for just one letter to reach and it's impossible to write a letter to someone who's always travelling so I can't really complain.

"Yuuko-san, did she not know as well....."

"Who knows."

Her voice seemed as if she was muttering to herself and even my own reply seemed to lack the strength in my voice.

That's how shocking that was. Yuuichirou. THAT Yuuichirou was living together with a woman!

That kid, though this might sound really rude, but he's too naïve when it comes to things concerning romance. He's the type who'd forget to tell his own feelings because he couldn't say it once.

[Why the hell are you grinning like that. Looks disgusting.]

".....You really show no mercy, do you?"

Now that I think about it, I forgot to tell him about the Griffin subjugation in the end.

## Chapter 67: Such Days Without Fighting ③

Hiding myself in a not so thickly grown, lush tree, I gazed up at the sky.

The sky was clear and blue, the clouds white, and the sun was shining as the cold wind caressed my cheeks. While tightening my body from the cold wind, I have continued staring at the sky.....for about 3 hours now. Not that I have a watch on me and I am only able to tell that from the movement of the sun, but I'm pretty sure I'm not wrong.

"About 4, is it.....?"

"nah, that one is slightly smaller than the ones we had seen till now, so that makes it 5."(renji)

"Really? But like the one before, its wing is also slightly damaged though."

"Mu."

[.....It's amazing how you guys can tell all that from down here.]

While we counted the number of griffins in the sky, Ermenhilde spoke that in an amazed voice. No, we're not just playing around. Finding out the exact number of griffins before we head to subjugate them is also a very important job, you know.

Hiding in the tree, and carrying Mururu near my chest, I put on my mantle to endure the cold. And by hiding my body temperature like that, we observed the movement of the griffins.

Griffins in Elfreim normally make abundantly green mountains as their nests but there was only this bare mountain near Merdiore. There is not a speck of greenery on this mountain.

Then that means these griffins' behaviour is probably different from the ones me or Mururu know of. Or rather, the griffins must have changed their behavioural patterns to adapt to this new land. And to investigate that, we are observing them from the morning.

It's not like Mururu pestered me to do something else since there was only chess to play at our inn or anything. This is also a job. We'll even get a reward for this.

"It's easy. The one flying right now has a damaged wing.....and the new griffin's cry is slightly higher pitched than the rest."(mururu)

"that's true."

[.....It's okay since I know that beastmen have senses far more sensitive than humans but it's really amazing how you can understand the same things, Renji.]

"It's experience that's all."(renji)

Also, to differentiate between monsters is a skill very necessary to

adventurers. Especially when in party, saying 'Go defeat that goblin' and 'Go defeat the goblin with a scar on its face' make a lot of difference. Those eyes and ears that can catch such peculiarities instantly are very important skills to have to an adventurer in my opinion.

While observing these griffins with Mururu, I gave a yawn.

It might have been better to stay inside with Aya and Feirona and watch their chess games.....Well, but then I recalled that the main reason we came here was because it was painful to just sit in one place and not move around at all.

By the way, currently the skill ranking in chess is Aya, then Feirona, then me and last is Solnea. And it won't be strange if Solnea surpassed me as well in a few days. I recalled even Aya telling how both Feirona and Solnea learnt things extremely fast. That means, I am just too slow at getting the hang of things. I recall I was told this about swordsmanship as well but still, it's a weird feeling to be surpassed by kids and amateurs so fast.

I have gotten quite used to this feeling as well but that doesn't change that it still feels a bit sad and frustrating.

So, getting scared of playing with Solnea again, I ended up going to the guild to get some jobs. Even feel like it's pathetic as I sighed.

Also, Feirona instantly became better than me. That actually didn't really surprise me at all though. I had already given up on that.

"The big one, isn't coming."(mururu)

“Yeah..”

We have been waiting since morning but the Arch griffin had yet to show itself to us. That is the one I want to see the most though. You can't tell a Griffin and an Arch Griffin apart from a single glance. Since they are technically the same race, there isn't much change in appearance. But they can be at least twice as big than normal having lived so long.

A griffin is usually 3-4m big. Slightly bigger than lions of our world. Their wingspan is really big so they seem much bigger than what they actually are. That said, it's still much bigger than a human.

In comparison, an Arch griffin can be as big as 5-7m. We don't exactly know how long a griffin lives but we do know that it becomes an Arch Griffin when it has grown to its limit. Even I think that the naming difference is very vague. But, its power is definitely different than normal.

Normal Griffins can use spirit magic that the Demihumans call [Ward Spells], and can destroy a magicians concentration from a single cry to stop their spell casting. But an Arch Griffin can even create wind blades and tornados. If we're talking about just wind magic, they can fight on equal or surpass this world's strongest magic users.

“Mururu, have you ever hunted an Arch griffin before?”

” No, papa said that it's dangerous and didn't allow it. Even though I am already an adult, he still called me a child and refused me.”

“I see.”

[Probably because your body is still too small.]

“I’ll grow big soon!”

Seeing her get worked up just from Ermenhilde’s single comment is exactly why she’s still a kid but I should probably not say that.

“Isn’t it nice though, it shows that your father deeply cares for you.”

“I wish he’d stop treating me like a child though.”

“In my opinion he’s just simply worried for you not because you’re a kid or anything.”

“.....Renji, are you taking my father’s side?”

“hmm.....I don’t know him nor have I ever seen him so I can’t really say.”

But I think I understand how her father feels. I really haven’t met him but I’m pretty sure that he really cares for Mururu. Maybe he’s worried as hell since Mururu had to come all the way here alone due to Zwenelia’s oracle. I recalled how Mururu had been broke when I met her. She had told how she had been robbed of all her money by some people. It’s great that it was just money. Those heartless people could even take someone’s life as well.

When I thought of that, I suddenly felt the warmth in my arms as more precious. Just thinking about how this warmth could get stolen, my heart

tightened. It's the same feeling I had for Aya and Souichi—and all the kids back then. Feeling like a parent yet not actually a parent. Even I can't explain it but I find those feelings really precious to me.

“What's wrong?”

“Nothing. I was just thinking about how I totally understand what your father felt.”

Hiding away on a ship, getting mugged. Anyone would be uneasy.

“Renji's also treating me like a kid?”

[That's not it, it's better to say that he's just worried for you.]

“That's right. It's just as Ermenhilde says Mururu.”(renji)

“fuuun.”

She didn't seem very satisfied and made a sulky sound. I felt that this was what made her seem so childish but I think at her age, I was also similar I think.

I smiled hoping she won't notice but she did notice it and my arm was slightly pinched. Rather than pain, it felt itchy. That was again also so amusing that I shook from laughter.

“Hmph.”



[If you get angry from just this, then you really are a kid.]

“That’s not true.”

This time she pinched my upper arm slightly stronger.

“ow, that hurt.”(renji)

“That was the intent.”(mururu)

As we continued looking at the sky while messing around like this, a few Harpies appeared in the sky this time. They had the lower body of a bird and the upper body of a hairy human. Instead of arms, they had wings, and though they didn’t have a beak, they had fangs inside their mouth. They were mostly orange-ish in colour.

Just when I was thinking that they probably rose p from near the foot of the bare mountain, they suddenly did a nosedive again. Looking that way, I spotted a few goblins moving on the ground.

And just when I thought they’d go directly at the goblins and attack them, even faster the Griffins violently assaulted the Harpies. Facing an attack from a body that’s more than 3m the harpies were unable to withstand it and began to freefall from just a ramming attack from the griffins. It’s not important but this is the time when Griffins hunt it seems.

“As expected, it has become like this.”(renji)

[What do you mean, Renj?]

“Nah, I was just thinking about how the movements of other monsters has also changed since the Griffins arrived.”

[That’s true.]

Goblins feed on cattle, humans and wild grass. Harpies feed on such goblins and humans. They had such an ecosystem built but due to the sudden appearance of Griffins that eat humans goblins and harpies, the hunting methods of monsters has changed. Or rather, both goblins and Harpies have stopped attacking anything out of fear. Due to that, even when the Griffins are prowling in the air, the other monsters come out of hiding unable to starve any longer. And that’s when the Griffins attack.

Right now, only the Griffins are winning alone.

If we leave them alone, the number of griffins will increase at a fast rate. And once the number of goblins and Harpies reduce, they’ll start attacking humans next. Here, it’d be the unlucky Merdiore city. Now, I doubt they are so lacking in personnel that the whole city would fall just to a few griffins but they will suffer quite a lot of damage.

Right now, there’s five of them and Griffin’s breeding season is in spring. After only a few months, their numbers will double. Griffins are similar to the birds of our world in the sense that they lay multiple eggs at the same time.

“Mururu, don’t move.”

“Un.”

Though we are pretty far away, the Griffins are sensitive to even the slightest of movements in the air due to having the protection of Sylph. And though there is a certain method to use that against them as well, it'll be difficult to face them with Mururu alone. And if it ended up calling other griffins, we'll have no way out.

Covering us with my mantle, I observed the Griffins as they preyed on the Harpies. Really, they are pretty big. In fantasy novels and manga, Griffins are often portrayed as rideable mounts but I really doubt these things are tameable. After all they eat humans and are really ferocious. Even if I was on its back, I'll only be worried of getting eaten by it.

The Griffins beak has a lot of strength. It can rip apart an arm off the body very easily. It was the same with even harpies as the Griffins tore them apart limb by limb and swallowed them whole. And after having their full, they left just the innards lying there and flew away. And even those innards were eaten away by the goblins, so all that was left was blood stains. Seeing such a scene right in front of me made me recall that one scene from that dinosaur movie but it is reality here. Thinking about how the next time I could be the one in place of those harpies, I really couldn't laugh about it.

Even after witnessing such a cruel scene, my heart didn't waver at all, probably because I've also grown up and matured now. And seeing that even Mururu showed no such signs either even though she's half my age once again proved to me the cruelty of this world. Not that someone like me who has only lived a mere 3 years here has any right to say about it though.

“Now then, it’s pretty depressing thinking of how we have to fight those things as well.”(renji)

“You’re always like that.”

[that’s true.]

“Really, you two sure get along so well.”(renji)

I have been trying to be more proactive recently you know? Is this that? Because the first impression was just so bad?

While thinking of that, I opened my mantle and stood up. Looks like it’ll be difficult to get to see the arch griffin today. Since the Griffins in the sky have disappeared as well, it’s about time to return.

Since I sat in the same position for such a long time, all of my joints hurt.

“We’re going back?”(mururu)

“yeah, do you have something else you want to do?”

“Nope.”

Saying that, she also jumped up to her feet. She really is so nimble. I feel that no matter how many times I see that.

“Renji, have you hunted a Griffin before?”(mururu)

“More or less, yeah.”

Griffins exist in Elfreim and Abenelm every here and there as if it was completely natural. I’m bad against flying opponents but that doesn’t mean I could just avoid them completely.

Well, we didn’t face them alone, magicians like Aya or Koutarou were good opponents against them. If they’re flying, hitting them with a single lightning attack would end it. The power of a thunderbolt.....is it referred to as ‘power’? but anyway, the voltage of a thunderbolt is about a billion volts. And the amount of time it takes to hit is just a microsecond. Even the temperature around the air increases incredibly high. There is no way to dodge it and nothing could survive after getting hit by that.....there was a time I truly thought that was the case. Well, dragons and ghosts-types are able to survive that without trying much.....Ghosts aside, I still find it strange how Dragons are still categorized under normal life forms.

“Can you beat one alone?”(mururu0

“Probably not.”(renji)

[Why do you reply that instantly.....]

“Because I’m an honest guy. I hate lying.”

[With which mouth are you saying that?]

Shrugging at Ermenhilde's amazed voice, I began walking towards Merdiore.

Mururu quickly came up to walk beside me as well. Due to the fear of griffins, the goblins and the harpies in the area don't come out much nowadays so it's pretty relaxed even walking so openly like this. That said, it's nothing more than postponing the actual problem.

"I'm hungry."(mururu)

"Well it is almost noon."

By the time we return to Merdiore, it'll be past noon. Thinking of that, I brought a cracker from a small bag attached to my belt.

"Want one?"(renji)

"Un."

Even after seeing that gruesome Griffin's eating scene, we were the same. Mururu ate that cracker beside me and looking at her made me hungry as well so I also brought out a piece of dried meat and bit on it.

Walking while eating isn't exactly good manners but I really am not in any position to say that. If Aya scolds, we'll both get scolded together. While I was walking and thinking of that, I felt my mantle getting slightly pulled. Looking that way, Mururu was looking up towards me.

“Will Fran not travel with us anymore?”(mururu)

“Well, yeah. She’s just a student. She has to go to school to learn a lot as well.”

“School?”

“It’s a place where men and women of her age go to study like in Magic City Ofan and here in Merdiores.”

“.....study.”

“It’s really important you know?”

“I see.”

She spoke, in a depressed voice.

I guess since they were so close, parting hurts even more. Right now they are in the same city but that’ll change when we get on the ship. Well, it’s one of the never changing things of travelling after all but I guess it must be harder at Mururu’s age.

“It’ll get lonely.”

“That’s true.”

I agreed to Mururu's mutterings. It will be a bit lonely. We travelled together for almost half a year, so it's only normal to feel that way.

But just because it makes you lonely doesn't mean you should hate such farewells in my opinion.

I am an adventurer. A traveller who goes from city to city, village to caves. With meetings come farewells. And then come reunions. You go away only to unexpectedly meet somewhere to have a happy reunion. When I said that, Mururu lightly hit me.

"If,"

"hm?"

"If fran said that she wanted to travel with us, will you take her along?"

"I wonder. If it's her own will to do so, I'll think about it."

That said, even if it's her own will, the journey from here onwards will be a matter of life and death. Unlike Imnesia, Elfreim is a land harsh to humans. Just because she got used to travelling a bit doesn't mean that I can take her there so readily. And Abenelm is beyond the question.

Well, I don't even plan on taking Mururu and the others to Abenelm either though. If possible, I just want to take Aya with me there.

".....I see."



“Don’t coerce her okay?”(renji)

“I won’t. I won’t even ask her to.....but.”

[But?]

“It’s nothing.”

Looks like she really does want to still travel with her. She’s still a young child. I understand the feeling of wanting to stay with a friend you finally made. But, this alone I cannot help. If she pushed her and got Ms Francesca injured, it’ll be Mururu who’d feel more hurt.

It’d be fortunate if it ended with just an injury in fact. Danger comes along with you when you’re travelling. From here onwards, monsters will only get stronger and stronger. Me, Feirona and Mururu will be busy protecting ourselves first. Even Aya can’t protect both Solnea and Ms Francesca at the same time. She’s specialised in using highly offensive magic spells after all, not protecting others. Now will Ms Francesca be able to protect herself when the time comes.....If you asked me that, I’ll hesitate in nodding.

“Don’t make such depressing face and let’s return. If you keep up that face, you’ll only make others worry more, right?”(renji)

“un.”

Putting my hand on her low hanging head, I lightly patted her. She didn’t

resist and let me continue. Back when I did this to Aya and Souichi, they usually cheered up again.

“Renji, I want to eat that as well.”

“Yeah, sure. Now eat this and cheer up.”

Handing over the dried meat that I had half eaten, Mururu quickly munched it down.

When you're hungry, your thought always go in the negative direction. Now though it'd be difficult to fill your stomach with just the emergency rations, it'd be great if she cheered up even a bit. It really messes with my own mood when she gets depressed as well. Maybe that's because I'm too indulgent towards children though.

[It's like you're artificially feeding your kids.] (T/N: like how animals or humans teach young animals how to eat.)

“Now that's just rude, Ermenhilde.”(renji)

“I'm not a kid.”

Even her reply to Eremnhilde's insensitive words was lacking energy. This might be a serious.

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Getting back to the inn, I saw a familiar looking carriage standing in front.

Confirming it with a side glance, I parted with Mururu and headed to the mens room but no one was there. Feirona was probably in the woman's room playing chess with the girls. Thinking of that, I somehow felt a bit lonely. What is this feeling of alienation I'm getting?

"Say, Ermenhilde?" (renji)

[What, Renji?]

I spoke up to Ermenhilde as I sat down after throwing my mantle on my bed.

"Are you also sad at parting with Ms Francesca?"

[Well, I guess I do feel lonely but then again, not really either.]

"What is that supposed to mean?"

[.....Meaning that, I'll be with you no matter what.]

"What an embarrassing statement."

[Really?]

Calming down after removing my equipment, fuu, I leaked out a heavy sigh.

I'm not lonely. After getting to Elfheim, I'll part with Mururu and Feirona as well after all. I have already resolved myself to say farewell to my comrades.

But, I also felt tired realizing that I had grown so accustomed to saying farewell to people that my emotions in the matter were nowhere near as strong as Mururu's. I recalled when I parted from Utano-san back at the capital. Half a year, maybe a full year even. It might get even longer, maybe I might never come back alive. Yet, I easily said my farewells and left on the journey. I wonder what she feels about that. Maybe if I get the chance, I should ask her that. Well, I think I'll just get humiliated if I ever asked her something like that though. I know that she shows no mercy at such times after all.

"Really, it's heartening to have you with me."(renji)

[fufu, I know right?]

"yeah."

I don't know how serious she was so I ended up smiling wryly. Maybe she said that just to cheer me up. Or maybe that was truly the will of Ermenhilde.

But, by talking like this, it's true that my heart felt slightly lighter than before.

Getting back up from the bed, I stretched my body. It's because I'm hungry that I'm thinking of such things. Just when I was thinking that, my door was knocked on.

"Come in, it's open."(renji)

"pardon the intrusion."

Along with those words, honey coloured hair that I hadn't seen in the past few days came into my view.

"Ms Francesca."

"It's been a while, Renji-sama."

She wasn't in her usual travelling clothes. Instead she was wearing high class elegant clothes.

"So? Did something happen?"(renji)

"Ah, no, I was just wondering how Mururu was so.."

[.....You two really do get along so well.]

"Eh?"

"It's nothing. So, did you meet Mururu already?"

Stopping Ermenhilde from saying anything more than necessary again, I spoke up. It'll only make this awkward between those two if Ms Francesca hears about it.

“Yes. Since I was in the other room till now.”(fran)

“I see. Oh right, why don't you sit down first. No need to talk while standing.”

Offering her a seat, I also sat down on the opposite side of the table.

“Want something to drink?”(renji)

“I'm fine, thank you.”

I missed her formal way of talking as well. As she gave a wide smile, I smiled as well.

“It's been a while. Have you been fine all this time?”(renji)

“fufu, looks like Renji-sama hasn't changed much either.”

[Not really. Just now, he was moping around thinking of various things.]

“.....Is that so?”

“well, who knows.”

Hitting Ermenhilde over my pocket, I simply gave a shrug to her question. Seriously, Ermenhilde talks a bit too much.

“Oh right, so you taught Chess to Solnea it seems?”(fran)

“Yeah, so, can you play chess as well?”

“A bit, I was taught by a friend. Since my friend had a set in our dorms.”

“I see. If possible, play with Solnea once in a while. She seems to have taken quite a bit of interest in it lately.”

“So it seems. I played her a while ago, and only won barely.”

Barely, eh? Was that an indication of her skill, or was she just being humble. Going by her personality, it’s probably the latter.

And aftr talking of such things with her for a while, the door was knocked on again.

“Yes?”

“pardon the intr——”

Before she could finish speaking, the door got opened. The one who knocked

on the door was Aya it seems but it was Mururu who opened the door half way through her words.

Probably, she got curious of what we were talking about alone in my room. Well, it was probably different for Mururu though.

“Ah, wai.....Mururu. You’re supposed to let me finish.....”(aya)

“Renji doesn’t care.”(mururu)

“I do care. Open the door after the proper greetings Mururu.”(renji)

“.....you do?”(mururu)

[Do you really care?]

Ermenhilde, you have the same opinion as Mururu as well?

“What if I was changing clothes? Wouldn’t it be awkward?”(renji)

“But Fran is here right now.....”(mururu)

“I’m talking about when she’s not.”

“I don’t care really.”



“Then do so. If you’re an adult already, normally women don’t just walk into a man’s room so thoughtlessly.”

“.....is that so?”

“Eh, ah, yes.....I think?”(aya)

Why did she ask Aya there? Is it because she’s also a girl?

Also, the fact that you don’t mind such things is proof that you’re still a child Mururu. I’m worried that she’ll get tricked by some weird man later on.

Aya being herself, who knows what she was imagining as she was blushing. Seriously, what are you imagining? Realizing my gaze, she panicked and look here and there trying to avoid me and cleared her throat.

[What were you imagining?]

“uwaah!?!”

[.....Why are you so surprised at my voice?]

As usual, this is so amusing. Offering both of them to sit as well, I moved to sit on my bed since there weren’t enough chairs. That means only Feirona and Solnea are in the other room. That room is bigger but I can’t just tell them to go away either. Thinking of shifting to that room if the talk paused for a while, ms Francesca brought up a different topic.

“Renji-sama, tomorrow night, do you have any prior appointment?”

“Nah, not really. Why?”

“My father, was hoping to invite both you and Aya-san to dinner.”

“me and Aya, eh?”

I looked towards Aya and she gave a nod. Since she also her senior at school, Aya didn't seem to mind it much. Looking towards Mururu, she was talking with Ms Francesca happily. Seeing her, I guess it really can't be helped I felt. That said, I don't think I need to read too deeply into this.

“What about Feirona, Mururu and Solnea?”(renji)

“It's fine. He has said to invite all of them as well.”(fran)

“Then, I accept that invitation.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, tomorrow you'll get to eat to your heart's content Mururu.”

“.....I don't eat that much.”(mururu)

When I said that, Mururu replied sullenly. Her expression was so adorable that all three of us gave a smile. She seemed to mind that as she lightly hit Ms

Francesca. While gently caressing her head, Ms Francesca seemed to be having fun as well. While looking at those two, I laughed and even Aya was smiling.

[It will get lonely I guess.]

At Ermenhilde words no one else reacted. Meaning those words came only to me.

“I guess so.”

That’s why, I also spoke truthfully.

## Chapter 68: Such Days Without Fighting ④

Getting down from the carriage prepared for us, I felt the cold wind on my cheeks. Looking up towards the sky, stars, that looked so close that you'd think you could just grab them, were shining brightly. I ended up staring at that starry sky in a daze.

This is like the Nth time I have thought this but really, the starry sky of this world is simply too beautiful. Though the pale bluish moon of our world was beautiful as well, once you get used to it, the red moon of this world is incredibly lovely to see as well. Back then, I didn't like it much since it reminded me of the colour of blood. Or rather, it felt really eerie and weird.

While I was thinking of such things, Aya and Feirona also got down from the carriage as well and stood beside me. As I had given my arm to help Aya get down, Feirona also gave a hand to Mururu. And lastly, Solnea got down as well.

Normally, I don't do such things but since Aya was currently wearing a light green dress made of out of a smooth cloth and high heels on her feet. The skirt of the dress was long but it had a slit on the left side giving her a more mature look. Since it looked difficult to walk in, I gave her my elbow as support and though shyly, she took it.

Mururu was in pure white dress and low heel shoes. At first she was also supposed to be wearing heels but she was unable to even walk in it so we switched to shoes.

By the way, when she tried the heels for the first time at the shop and almost

tripped, I tried supporting her only to get my own foot crushed by her heel as she stumbled. It hurt like hell, or rather, the top bone of my foot almost felt like it broke so I suggested to switch her into shoes. She wanted to wear the heels Ms Francesca chose but since it would cause only trouble to others, I had to stop her.

Solnea was not in her usual black dress and was instead wearing a light purple dress chosen by Ms Francesca. Since the dress made her body outline stand out and her white shoulders were in the open, it made her look really sexy.

All of these dresses were made to perfectly fit and weren't something one could make in just a day or two. But since they only invited us to dinner last night, how did they even order the tailor beforehand. Also, how did they know their sizes from?

"Do these clothes not look weird on me?"(elf)

"Just relax. You have a good looking face so you look good no matter what you wear."(renji)

[.....Is that supposed to reassure him?]

"I see."(elf)

For once, even Feirona was a bit conscious about what he was wearing. I guess it's only normal as instead of the normal travelling clothes he usually wore, he was currently wearing a tuxedo. Basically, clothes that properly follow a dress code. After getting the invitation last night, they prepared a set of formal clothes for us as well.

As expected, since he was handsome his dress really suited him and if not for the pointy elf ears, anyone would mistake him for someone from a noble family. Seeing him fiddle with necktie he was not used to wearing was charming as well.

Beside him, Mururu, probably slightly conscious of the short height of the knee-length skirt was pulling the hem of her skirt and kicking the ground with her boots repeatedly.

“If you kick the ground so much, those specially prepared boots would get dirty you know?”(renji)

“Ah.”

When I said that, she quickly stopped having realized what she was doing. Seeing her unable to calm down having worn such clothes for the first time made her look really childish.

“This skirt and boots, they feel weird.”(mururu)

“I’m not used to this necktie either. Yeah, they do feel weird.”(elf)

“un.”

Saying that, she held and shook the hem of her skirt. Under the faint light coming from the mansion, her white thighs looked charming. I thought I had gotten used to seeing that considering Mururu’s always wearing hotpants-like

short pants but in a skirt, the feeling is completely different from before.

[How improper.]

“As a girl, Mururu has to get used to wearing skirts someday or the other though.”(renji)

“Muu.”

“Just like how Aya, you have to get used to wearing heels.”(renji)

“Uu.....”

While finding her to be charming as usual as she held on to my arm to walk, I looked towards her face right which was right beside me. Her hair, instead of being tied to the side as usual, had been tied behind her neck with a barrette right now. Though she had a childish look to her usually, right now she looked more like a splendid lady. That is, if she learns to walk properly in high heels.

[Why not just wear slightly less taller heels?]

“I thought I’d get used to it one I started walking.....”(aya)

Looks like even she thought that she should have gone for less taller heels as her reply to Ermenhilde lacked power.

“It’s fine, it’s a rare occasion after all. And it’s not like skirts and heels are

dangerous or anything.”

Well, if you move like you normally do in a skirt, it'll be dangerous in a different way though. But not saying that, I just yawned. Ah, but, I'll be glad if my foot wasn't stomped on by a heel again. That really hurt, okay.

I turned my gaze towards the silently standing Solnea. Since getting on the carriage, she hasn't spoken much. I was worried that something might have happened but apparently she was silent solely because there was nothing interesting to talk about, that's all. This wasn't her first time riding a carriage either and neither did she find the night scenery very interesting. In my opinion, the city at night felt pretty nice though.

“Now that I think about it, you sure seem to have no problems wearing high heels.”(renji)

“Got used to it.”(sol)

“.....It's convenient how that's all the explanation you have.”

“Whether it be chess, or wearing heels. Solnea-san really learns everything fast.”(aya)

“Is that so?”(sol)

It doesn't seem like she's aware of it either. Even though Aya said that, she just spoke that sounding slightly perplexed. But, truly, it is as Aya said. Having already learnt all the rules of chess according to Aya-sensei, Solnea wouldn't lose to any of the townsfolk anymore! I should take her to that place once more



in a few days. I thought that she'd be happy, then tilted my head in confusion. I couldn't imagine Solnea showing such a emotion. I really want to at least see her smile but that's still a far away goal.

[What was it? The word from your world used for Aya and Mururu as they are currently.....?]

“‘Good clothes can make anyone look great’, that one?”(renji)

[yeah, that one.]

“I'll get angry Renji-san, Eru.”(aya)

Even though she said that in a playful voice, both us were lost for words. It was Ermenhilde who asked that though.....And Ermenhilde being herself was asking me [Was it not a compliment?] Looks like she didn't get my joke.

Hearing that, was it just my imagination that Aya's smile became even scarier? While facing the contradictory situation of getting glared at and smiled at, at the same time, I felt once more that Aya really was turning more and more like Utano-san. She's become mentally stronger, or rather, has become able to say what she wants to. Well, that woman looks at people with a gaze that feels like she's looking at garbage and not a smile like Aya though. Trying to run from Aya's 'smile', I turned to look towards the noble mansion shining under the red moonlight.

It should be obvious but it was much bigger than any other normal house. There was a wall around the whole mansion and the entrance was a huge iron door. Through the gate, there was a courtyard big enough that it'd take a few

minutes to cross it even with a carriage and finally at the end was the mansion itself that looked similar to a european style house from the medieval times.

It was Ms Francesca's.....Barton family's mansion. After coming to Merdiroe, this was my first proper visit to here but still, under the red moonlight, the mansion looked eerily silent. Well, I actually can hear some voices from inside and I can clearly see the light from the lamps in the corridors of the mansion as well. By the way, since most nobles had still not switched to using magic lamps, they still used normal lamps inside their houses.

A while after all of us got down from the carriage, the driver took away the carriage to somewhere behind the mansion.

"Now, for a while, don't talk okay?"(renji)

[I can talk as long as you guys don't react right?]

".....Well, I guess only if it's just to me."

I'm used to hearing Ermenhilde talk while in public as well after all. When I said that, instead of Ermenhilde, Aya gave a giggle. What was there to laugh about in this conversation?

"You can talk to me as well, Eru."(aya)

[Umu. I'd get bored if I don't talk at all. Aya's kind after all.]

"You make it sound as if I'm not kind though?"(renji)

[But Renji was the one told me to stay quiet, right?]

And what came was her sulky voice.

I wasn't really trying to hurt her but she got angry anyway. Looks like Ermenhilde really just wants to talk to me regardless of circumstances. Now I understand her feelings, but there are some manners even between friends. I don't like seeing her get angry at me either. Well, I do when I feel like teasing her though.

"Wait, Ermenhilde?"(renji)

[Hmph. I'll only talk to Aya for the whole evening.]

".....Ah, Ermenhilde-san?"

Though she doesn't seem that angry, it should be fine but it's still a bit sad to not get a response from her. Just when I was wondering what to do, the door to the mansion opened and an aged man in a tuxedo appeared. As the double doors opened, the light of the lamps inside shone bright on my eyes which had gotten used to the darkness of the night.

"I apologise to have made you wait for so long."(man)

"No, please do not be concerned."(renji)

Answering that it was nothing formally, we began to walk. Looks like she got

slightly used to the heels as Aya seemed to be walking much better than before. She's still has linked up arms with me though.

Walking through the high class red carpet, and after another door, about ten or so maids and butlers were waiting for us.

Since he was probably not used to this, Feirona's body was quite stiff. And even Mururu, probably unconsciously had moved behind me and Aya as if hiding. Solnea continued to walk as usual with her dazed face.

"Renji-sama, Aya-sama."

Beyond these maids, standing in front of the stairway that went to the second floor of the mansion, a woman spoke up. Looking towards that voice, Ms Francesca was standing there wearing a bright yellow coloured dress.

Since I was more used to seeing her in her travelling clothes and school uniform, for a second I failed to even recognise her. Even her hair, that was normally tied behind her head with a ribbon, was tied with a white ribbon and hanging from above the left shoulder. This new look gave a fresh feeling but I had to really restrain myself to not let my gaze move towards her chest that was even more emphasized because she was wearing a corset.

"Everyone, thank you very much for coming here tonight."(fran)



Saying that, she held the both ends of her skirt and gave an elegant bow. That action was so refined that it felt really graceful . looks like she really has properly been taught in noble mannerisms as well. Well, since she talked very

politely normally as well, I was pretty sure already. But because her image as an adventurer is so strong, it still made me slightly shocked.

I ended up muttering 'houu' under my breath. Even though she's barely older than Aya, she's so masterful at this.

"And thank you to have invited all of us here as well."(renji)

Answering her, I also gave a bow. After me, everyone else gave a bow as well. Was she surprised by hearing me speak so seriously as well, Ms Francesca's smiling face broke for a second and showed a surprised expression. But she instantly fixed that.

[It seems it such things really don't suit you.]

I know very well. Because I feel the same. Ms Francesca probably heard that as well as her smile seemed less stiffer than before.

Answering back to Ermenhilde inside my head, I lightly hit on the medal from above the pocket. Seeing that usual action from me, Aya gave a sigh beside me.....It wasn't my fault, it was Ermenhilde who didn't read the mood. Why did it feel like she was blaming me? Did I make a mistake in educating her somewhere?

"Please follow me. We have prepared a meal for you, and hope that it suits your taste."(fran)

Saying that, she led us towards what was probably the dining hall. Soon, the man who accompanied us from the inn till the mansion opened up the door to

the room.

Though not very old, he still seemed much older than the other butlers. He might be something like the head butler here.

As expected, we were led to the dining hall. On a long table that could fit at least ten people at the same time had some fruits decorated on top of it. In every corner, splendid items that fit a noble's house were kept. A giant vase, or a painting that didn't make much sense, a silver statue of the goddess and what was possibly a horn of a demonic beast was hanging on the wall.

All of these seemed to be high class items but the fact that they were all kept in a way not to purposefully show them off gave a good impression. I guess since they are merchants at heart, they probably don't indulge in the usual noble habits that much. It's a real pain to see a finely crafted vase inlaid with gems and stuff and then get an infinitely long explanation about how some famous craftsman made it. Looking inside the dining hall, since there wasn't that kind of atmosphere, I felt relieved.

And my gaze turned towards the 4 people standing towards the other side of the long table. One was Melentia-san. I had heard that ms Francesca was the youngest of three sisters so the one standing to the left of Melentia-san must be the middle sister. Though the oldest sister and the youngest seemed to have the same honey coloured hair and voluptuous body, the second sister in contrast had pale blue hair and was also wearing a similar coloured dress on her not so sexy body. She was slightly shorter as well, enough that I wouldn't have been surprised if she was the youngest of the three.

Melentia-san was, though different from the one I saw before, wearing a passionate red dress. With those strong willed eyes, red really suited her.

Then, my gaze met a quite youthful looking woman who should be the mother of these three. Like the second daughter she also had pale blue hair tied up, and was looking towards us with a sharp gaze. Looks like Melentia-san's sharp gaze is inherited from her mother. But the mother was much shorter in height than Melentia-san, barely to her shoulders. Though still taller than the second daughter.

"Well well, thank you very much for having come to our house today."

And the one spoke that should be the father. I just felt it from a single glance. With the same honey coloured hair and gentle smile, tall, and tight physique. Honestly, he might be more muscular than even me. Rather than a merchant, the man felt more like an adventurer. Even his properly cut made him look all the more manly.

Rather than hold a pen and signing papers, holding a sword seems to fit him more. He probably in his forties but he looked much younger. Seeing his smile, he really felt like he was Ms Francesca's father. Whether it be the hair, the smile, or atmosphere in general.

"Thank you for inviting us today."(renji)

"Oh please raise your head. It's not such a big thing."

"Very well, please excuse me then."

The conversation was the same even from when we were travelling as Heroes and met nobles but hearing the father sound honestly surprised, even I felt a bit



surprised.

Unlike his appearance, he's quite the humble man it seems. That was my first impression of him at least. I feel that it was nice to see him so friendly rather than sound high-handed, when the mother, who was standing beside him, elbowed him in the side. And it was amusing to see Melentia-san move away so that we don't notice that. Judging from the flow of events, it looks like this was a common thing. A timid father and his confident wife eh?

"We, well then, please take a seat Renji-sama, Aya-sama, and Francesca's friends as well."

Seeing him use formal speech to even Feirona and others, I felt like I understood his nature slightly. Beside me sat Aya, then Solnea, Feirona, Mururu, in that order. When sitting, I didn't forget to pull the chair for Aya either. It's a part of the gentlemanly conduct after all.

Saying thanks in a small voice, Aya sat down. Confirming that her mouth was slightly upturned, I also sat down without saying anything further.

Sitting directly opposite to me was Ms Francesca's father, then the mother in front of Aya, and Francesca sat in front of Mururu. Giving a smile towards Mururu, she returned a light smile as well. While finding that to be lovely, I turned back towards the father sitting in front.

"Oh sorry to have been late in introducing myself, I am Leonhart Barton."

"And his wife, Arteria."

As he gave a perfect bow, it was hard to imagine him to be the same man who was elbowed by his wife.....by Mrs Arteria.

“During the journey, it seems you saved Francesca’s life. And no amount of thanks can be enough for that.”

“Please raise your head, Leonhart-dono. In fact, I was the one who was saved by your daughter many times.”

After that for a while, I praised ms Francesca for a while. I shouldn’t be the only one who ends up slightly exaggerating a daughter’s exploits during her journey to her parents right?

In the mean time, Ms Francesca seemed to be constantly muttering something with a red face but I decided to ignore it. I think she probably trying to deny what I was saying out of embarrassment in a really small voice. Seeing that even the sharp eyed Arteria-san and Melentia-san were also listening attentively , though I felt bad for Ms Francesca, I was happy to see that she was really loved in her family. I wasn’t sure what kind of position she’d have in the family as she was told to not have a talent in magic but it seems she’s really loved.

“Ah but, talking so much even when dinner is in front of us, I’d feel bad for the cooks who went through all the effort to make this.”(renji)

Since my talk about Ms Francesca finally reached an end, I spoke that. It’s fun to talk about our travels but it’d be rude to the cooks to not eat the dishes in time. And I’d feel bad to make Mururu wait any longer as well.

“That’s true. Then let us continue our talk after dinner is done, shall we?”(leo)

“Yes.”

“If possible, Aya-sama, it’d be great if you could tell us some stories of Francesca at school as well.....”

“of course.”(aya)

First both Aya and me took a taste of the dishes, then everyone began to eat at their own pace.

To Solnea, Aya said to imitate her as well as she could. Looks like Mururu was imitating after Ms Francesca and Feirona as told beforehand. As expected, it’d be impossible to teach her table manners in a single day after all.

She seemed quite eager to learn but simply didn’t have the concentration for it. She was bad at delicate actions and staying still after all.

Normally, it’s considered good manners to not talk when eating but tonight, as if showing to be at ease, Leonhart-san often spoke up. I for one truly enjoy a lively meal so I continued to answer to him. Of course, most of these questions were about Ms Francesca though. At times, as if he finally recalled, he did ask about us as well.

It’s fine to just treat me and Aya as normal people you know? But even if I said that, I’d only end up making these people feel troubled so I didn’t.

When we finished with the appetisers, the soups were brought in. It was a maid who brought it in, and there was no excess in any of her movements. Without making a single sound, she took away the dishes on which the appetisers were served and the soup dishes were placed.

[.....this won't be enough for Mururu.]

But since I couldn't reply to her, I just gave a slight nod so that Leonhart-san and others don't notice.

Beside me, Aya, gave a short giggle.

.

.

After finishing the main dish and the dessert, I took a breath as I wet my throat down with the wine. Though I have been properly taught table manners, all this formality still stiffens up my shoulders.

By the way, Aya and Mururu were brought fruit juice. Alcohol is only after they become adults. Both seemed to look at me implying not to treat them as children but on this matter alone, I won't yield.

"Renji-sama, Aya-sama, would you perhaps have some time after this?"(leo)

"Is there something you need?"(renji)

“Need, or rather, there’s something I want to discuss about.”

He must have something he really wants to talk about it seems. Judging by his side glances, it must be about Ms Francesca. The fact he asked for Aya as well was.....well, probably because he’s treating her in the same way as me as she has the status of a hero like me as well. Honestly, I’d like nothing more than to be treated normally but with Aya here as well, I hesitated to say that.

“I do not mind. Feirona, can I leave Mururu and Solnea to you?”(renji)

“Sure.”

Somehow I feel like I have been asking Feirona to act as babysitter quite a lot of times recently. But if I said that I feel like Mururu would get angry so I won’t.

“Then, Francesca, go take your friends to your room to talk will you?”

“Ah, yes.”(fran)

“Melentia, Kalafina, both you also go and get acquainted with them as well.”

When leonhart-san said that, everyone else left their seats silently. And at the same time, I handed over Ermenhilde to Feirona as well.

[I can finally talk.]

Her voice resounded in my head. Since Melentia-san and others are still there,

I wanted to tell her to not talk yet. Well, Feirona should be able to take care of that. I feel like I rely a lot on him. Or maybe Ms Francesca might introduce even her to her sisters.

I'll leave that aside for now. Though I don't want too many people to be able to hear Ermenhilde's voice either. As everyone left, only me, Aya, Leonhart-san and Mrs Arteria were left in the room. The maids silently cleared away the dishes and left as well.

"Once again, you have my gratitude to have been helping my daughter till this day."(leo)

Once again, Leonhart-san and Arteria bowed.

"Please, I said this before as well but your daughter has helped me many times as well. And she has even been helping Aya here at school as her senior as well."(renji)

"Yes, Francesca-senpai has been very kind to us at school as well so please raise your heads."(aya)

Now if I only I could tell how much I dislike such formalities. But that'd only make it sound even ruder. Since they are the ones welcoming us here, we have a duty act accordingly as well. That's what we refer to as courtesy.

It was too stiff for people like me and Aya who were commoners to the core but this also comes as a part of having the title of a Hero I believe. This'd sound like worthless nagging but I really don't think the title of a Hero suits me. I wasn't born as a noble and lived such a life after all.

“So, what is the matter you wanted to talk about Leonhart-san?”(renji)

“Yes, that’s.....this may sound rude but from your point of view, how is Francesca?”(leo)

“Meaning?”

Unable to get what he was asking, I asked him to explain.

Leonhart-san looked towards him straight, and with a strong gaze.

“I always thought that she was the type who hated fighting. Raised almost as a princess, she grew up as a tender-hearted girl.....but then she awoke to magic, and began to head on that path.”

Looks like the topic was about ms Francesca after all. As he spoke while slightly shivering, I almost felt sadness from him. And as his face bent lower and lower as he spoke, I got worried for a second that he might even be crying.

.....Beside him, mrs Arteria seemed to be looking at him with a chilly gaze though.

“I do not wish for her to get involved in such dangerous things, we are from a merchant family after all. Now though it’d be difficult for her to inherit the family business, at least I want her to live the life as a daughter of a merchant house would, and one day marry a man in the same business like Kalafina.”

“uh, okay.....?”

Aya spoke sounding troubled but Leonhart-san seemed to have not heard that. After that, for a while, he told us about Ms Francesca before she went to the magic Academy. Like how she hated bugs, and even used magic to get rid of them. That was how the [magician] Francesca Barton was born in fact.

It seems though the people of this family posses magical energy, they can't use magic itself so they were very surprised at first, and then became very happy. But as a result, she got completely absorbed in magic and finally enrolled in the academy. By the way, Leonhart-san was against that decision apparently. He even gave fervent speech about it. Just how much does he like his daughter? At first I thought he was the mild type of person but looks like inside, he's quite the passionate man. That part of him quite resembles Ms Francesca as well to be honest.

"I apologise. When it comes to our daughters, my husband stops seeing everything else."(arteria)

"No, as a man, I do understand his feelings as well."(renji)

I think every male parent is like this when it comes to daughters.

I'll get really worried whenever Yui-chan would be reckless or do something dangerous and if she ever got a boyfriend I won't be able to calm down I think.

Well, before me, that boyfriend would have to pass the tall wall that is KNIGHT and Fafnir though. And she's just 16 right now anyway, such things are still far away.



I thought that but then again, Aya was 15 back then, and Masaki-chan was 16.....realizing that, I guess they were this age as well when she began clinging to Souichi. Then there was also Yuuichirou's case but when it comes Yui-chan, I don't think she'd get a lover without telling anyone. When I met her in the capital, she showed no such signs as well and even that over talkative Anastasia didn't say any such thing.

"Is that so?!"(leo)

I got a bit surprised by leonhart-san as he suddenly rose his face and said that but something happened underneath the table that he shook once and then seemed to calm down a lot.

What the heck just happened under the table? His foot must have been stomped on I think. Happens a lot to me as well after all. I won't say by whom though.

"Well——this is the main matter but, can Francesca survive and achieve accomplishments as an adventurer?"(leo)

"As an adventurer, is it?"

"Yes."

"After returning home, we heard a lot about Francesca's travels with Renji-sama from her."(arteria)

".....I see."(renji)

Now, what did she tell I wonder. She didn't go through anything that might make this father of hers so sad though. In contrast, Mrs Arteria didn't seem to show much unrest like her husband. So, she was the one who continued the topic.

Even though he looks like such a firm man, is he that weak mentally? Or was it only because it concerned his daughter?

"She spoke about it very happily, in fact she showed a smile we never saw from her when she was at home."(arteria)

"I see..."

"After getting saved by Renji-sama, everything started when you decided to help her with her academy assignment supposedly?"

"Yes, that's right. Now that I recall, the first time I met her was when I saved her from that goblin attack eh?"(renji)

How nostalgic. It's almost been half a year from that time.

After getting almost killed by some goblins, she cried a lot. Even though now I think she has grown strong enough to manage even a group of goblins alone.

"But, though she was very lively at first after returning home, recently she has been sighing around a lot."

“Sighing, you say?”

I glanced at Aya but she shook her head. Looks like even Aya has no idea what’s this about.

Of course, neither do I.

After a few months, she’ll also graduate from the academy. Now I don’t know what she plans to do after that but I believe that she’s been sighing because she’d be unable to travel with Renji-sama and your group any longer.”

“Did she say that?”(aya)

“No. That girl, I wonder who she’s taken after, but she always tries to carry her burdens and problems alone.”

“I see.”

Giving vague replies, inside, I agreed as well.

Back when we first met, she had been trying to do everything alone after all. Even though she wasn’t even used to travelling, she tried helping me as well. Even though she couldn’t cook, she tried hard to.

She did all out of good intention and she did help me a lot. And above, all it was lonely to travel alone so travelling with her made me feel lively as well.

But, she wasn’t in any way perfect at everything and there were many times she got depressed due to not being of much help to others. Because I know

that, I could understand what Mrs Arteria was saying.

“So, how does this concern to being an adventurer?”(renji)

“.....if she had the ability to excel as an adventurer, would it be possible for her to continue to travel along side you Renji-sama?”

“I see. So that’s what you mean.”(renji)

Fumu, I rested my chin on my fingers.

I didn’t expect something like this. I didn’t see any difference in Ms Francesca when she came to meet us at the inn and she didn’t seem to show any reaction when I talked about travelling to Elfreim either.

That’s why, I was sure that she had also somewhat resolved herself to part ways with us.

“Did Francesca-san say something like that even once?”(renji)

“No. Like I said before, she—-”

“Now this might sound very harsh of me but our journey from hereon will be very dangerous. Honestly speaking, I cannot guarantee that even me or Aya would return back safe.”

I could sense the two in front of me gulp.

I said this to Mururu as well but we aren't strong enough to be able to protect her in that kind of place as well. The divine protection of the goddess didn't make us omnipotent.

I can't even fight properly unless against an apostle or a descendant of a God and Aya only specialises in attacking. I hired Feirona and Mururu solely to protect Solnea. There was not much margin to add Ms Francesca into it as well. Then, she'd have to protect herself.

"If she understands the danger, and wishes and openly speaks to still travel with us, and....."

And...

"If Leonhart-san is still willing to send his own precious daughter to such a dangerous journey, I am willing to conduct a test."

I wonder will he allow it? To let her daughter go off on a dangerous journey.....where she could even die?

If it was me—— I don't know. I wonder what it'd be. I have never truly had a daughter and I am currently taking Aya, who was closest to a daughter to me, on said journey but somewhere deep inside I wish for her to be somewhere safe as well.

If Yui-chan ever said that she wanted to go on such a dangerous journey, how would I answer?

“I assume you are aware of the Griffin nest near Merdior yes?”(renji)

“Wha, yes.”

“Information is life to merchants, I guess.”

It should be obvious that’d they’d be aware of such a thing.

“Soon, we’ll be subjugating those griffins. If she says that she wants to come with us, she’ll have to prove her strength there.”(renji)

Saying all that without a pause, I took a deep breath.

If Ms Francesca were to travel with us again, Mururu will be happy, and Solnea will also have another opponent to play chess with. And honestly, it’s never bad to have too many beauties on a journey.

But, the journey is very dangerous. Death is a possibility.

If she fully understands that, gets approval of her parents, and shows to have strength enough to protect herself, only then——

“From when I first met her, she has definitely gotten much stronger. But the question still remains whether she’d be able to protect herself in the upcoming journey.”(renji)

But, I thought. It was like this back when I first met her as well. Even when I

said that she might die, she still looked ahead. She completed the Orc subjugation.

These two asked whether she'd be able to become an accomplished adventurer but I wouldn't know that.

I may have travelled around the world in order to subjugate the Demon God but still I have only been an adventurer for just 2 years.

But then again, I do think I faintly understand what's important to an adventurer.

Will and effort. Talent comes second. Though one might need talent to make some great accomplishments as an adventurer but to an adventurer, what's more important is the will to survive and to put in effort for it.

"Is that all you wanted to talk about?"(renji)

"Uh, Yes."

"I see. Then, we'll take our leave. Thank you very much for this enjoyable time tonight."

Taking another breath, I gave a meaningful smile.

Relaxing at that, both clearly broke their expressions. I may consider the title of a Hero as a burden but that's not so to the society. They will see me as the Hero no matter what. Even now they seemed to be acting sorry wondering if

they had angered me by anything.

Even though they are much more amazing having so much wealth, and ships that were the corner stone for trade, than someone like me whose only accomplishment is to have killed a God.

But no matter what I say right now, it wouldn't reach these two. I'll ask Mururu to tell it to Ms Francesca later.

"We'll prepare a carriage so can you please wait a while?"

"Of course. I need to talk to Francesca-san as well. When the carriage has been prepared please call us."(renji)

Saying that, I stood up. I've eaten my fill and also got to hear a lot about Ms Francesca and her past as well. In the end, it became slightly awkward but I can call this an enjoyable night I think. I really must be a commoner to the core to be already thinking for a way to apologise for tonight later.

"Aya, let's go."

Holding out my left elbow, Aya entwined her arm around mine. Looks like she still hasn't gotten used to the heels. How charming, really.

"Sorry to have decided all that by myself."(renji)

"It's fine. As long as Francesca senpai wishes for it and Renji-san is fine with it."



“.....It'll be a dangerous journey though.”

“fufufu.”

Did I say something amusing as Aya gave a small laugh.

Leonhart-san gave a clap and the door to the dining hall was opened and a few butlers came in. Looks like they're here to lead us to ms Francesca's room. So we followed after the butler.

“I'm with you as well. Let's protect them together.”(aya)

“Yeah.”

How reassuring, really.

“I'll be relying on you then.”(renji)

“Yes. Please do—as much as you want.”(aya)

The moment she said that, due to the heels, she stumbled even though there was nothing in the way.

She didn't fall as she was supported by my elbow but how should I say it.....yeah..

“I'm still uneasy about this.”(renji)

“.....I’m not wearing heels ever again.”(aya)

That’s not okay on its own though.

## Chapter 69: The Hunt and the Test

*clack clack* a dry sound reached my ears. Finding that sound to be calming, resting myself completely to the back of my chair, I read the letter in my hand.

The sender was Utano-san and the content was regarding the reward for subjugating the Griffins. And also a demand to send back a letter telling her about our current situation. She knows that I'm not really the type who writes back letters but looks like she's really worried for us. Now even I have no choice but to write back a letter in such a case. I smiled bitterly.

But, what should I write back in the letter? While recalling the various events that occurred after coming to Merdiore, I spread out a blank paper cleanly in front of me. Even like this, I am the type who takes good care of things, you know?

As I stretched my body, my back gave a slight crack.

"What was written inside?"(aya)

Here in the Men's room, Aya, who was playing chess with Solnea, asked that. And even Solnea who sat in front of her looked towards me reacting to Aya's words.

Feirona and Mururu had gone along with Ms Francesca to do some work in the neighbourhood. While we're just relaxing here playing chess. Seriously, our lives are so peaceful right now. But that'll only last till today.

Glancing at the blue bird resting on the edge of my bed——Utano-san's familiar, I gave a sigh.

By the way, Utano-san really loves this small blue bird. She really went through a lot of trouble to finally find it. This world is a place where the weak are eaten by the strong. Survival of the fittest. A small powerless bird like this would instantly end up as a monster's prey. What fly freely in our world, in this world these type of birds are, though not an endangered species, but still are very less in number. The reason she was so fixated to have this small blue bird as her familiar was because apparently it's supposed to bring happiness or something. She only heard it from somewhere but she really holds it dear. When I gently caressed the small bird with my finger, it made an adorable tweeting voice.

“Is your match over?”(renji)

“No, not yet.”(sol)

“I see. Then first finish it. Then we'll talk.”

It was Solnea who replied and hearing what I said, she instantly turned back towards the chess board. In contrast, Aya seemed to be really curious about the contents of the letter so she continued to look this way for a while but soon turned back towards the board as well.

Same black hair, beautiful looks, tall height; seeing the various similarities between these two, they really felt like sisters. Solnea would be the older sister though. In terms of looks and body that is.

Once more, *clack clack* the dry sound resounded in the room.

From the open window, the noise from the streets could be heard, and the cold wind passed making my clothes sway. The bare mountain visible in the distance had now become a nest for Griffins and the small black spots that are visible occasionally must be the griffins out for enthusiastically hunting their prey.

While thinking of such things, I pondered over the contents of the letter.

It was a letter written in proper Japanese. We can read it easily but the inhabitants of this world can't even read or understand a single bit of it. Back when we were just summoned we had no choice but to talk in Japanese even though it was inconvenient but now it's become something like a code language for us.

Taking out Ermenhilde from my pocket, I flicked it up with my thumb. As it twirled in the air, shining in the sunlight, I grabbed it and opened to see. It was tails.

"haah."

[what's wrong?]

"Nah, it's just that the coin toss gave a tails so I feel like something bad's about to happen."

[Isn't that the usual though?]

Why are you sounding so excited there?

Griffin subjugation. That alone isn't very problematic. After all, I even have experience fighting dragons that are much more troublesome than just griffins. I won't feel as troubled just to fight some griffins after all I've been through now.

I know how to beat them. Drop lightning if flying, and if that's difficult, use bait to lure them to the ground and cut their wings using that chance. No matter how great the protection of wind spirit Sylph they might have, they can't fly without wings. After that, it's just a big beast that can use magic.

.....the fact that it can use magic puts in a whole different class from other beasts though.

"Are you worried about something?"

"Hm?"

Did she notice what I was thinking, Aya was looking towards me instead of the board. Looks like it was Solnea's turn to make a move.

"What?"(renji)

"Renji-san, are you worried about something? Because you've been flipping Ermenhilde a lot recently."

“.....Is that so?”

While saying that, I put the medal back inside my pocket. I guess, it's become a habit of mine? I myself never realized it though. But, certainly, whenever something happens I do recall flipping the medal to test whether it'd be good or bad.

“Now, we'll be getting quite busy from hereon Ermenhilde.”(renji)

[Yeah. I can't wait.]

“Oh please, I don't enjoy putting my life on the line you know?”

While saying what I always say, I caressed the blue bird again.

What should I do next? The reward for Griffin subjugation, now I don't know the current market price for that but the amount the capital—-Utano-san has suggested is a pretty big one. With this much money, it'll be easy to gather adventurers who'd fight alongside us. I'll leave that to Dagram though and we should start preparations for the subjugation I guess.

There's also the test for Ms Francesca as well and also the existence of a tough enemy, the Arch Griffin. No matter how much we prepare ourselves, there's nothing as being overprepared in this case.

And as for Ms Francesca's test, I feel like they're overthinking about it a bit too much. As for me, I just want proof that she won't hold us back.....that is,

she'll be able to protect herself. In the end, she's only become an adventurer 6 months ago. I don't expect her to have movements like Feirona or Mururu in just that much time. And of course, neither do I expect her to be able to use magic like Aya either.

As long as she can follow my instructions, not falter even against an incredibly powerful enemy, and if she can be quick witted at any instant. Knowledge and experience will come to her gradually. Just because she worked hard for a week or two, she won't grow that much. It'll be difficult to defeat a griffin with just her magic so rather than learn attack magic, what's more important will be to learn binding and restraining type magic. I wonder if she has realized that.

But then again, I, who didn't give her any advice and left it all to others, am not being very nice either. Thanks to that, I feel like Mururu hasn't been talking to me much these days. I do understand that she's trying to implicitly tell me to give her advice though.

Well, it's not bad to put in some hard work, and Feirona's with her as well so she shouldn't overdo it.

[You're always like that.]

"I don't want to die yet after all."

At Ermenhilde's voice, I gave a light response. I spoke that very honestly and was truly what I thought as well. I don't want to die. That's what makes me, me.

Aya who heard that giggled as she moved her piece. It was funny to see Solnea look at Aya puzzled at that.



“mou, don’t speak such ominous things, will you?”(aya)

“Hm, sorry, sorry.”(renji)

As I gave an apology to Aya, ‘Check’, she spoke. Looks like their match is heading towards the end as well. Or maybe Aya’s finally taking the game seriously only now.

Feirona, Mururu and Solnea have started to get used to the area, Ms Francesca seems to have gotten more calmer as well, and due to the Griffins, there are way less monster attacks these days. Even though threat and danger is just beside us, our current lifestyle is might be the most relaxed out of all the times I have travelled.

We spent two weeks like this. But this peace is also finally coming to an end.

“I really wanted to laze around a bit more.”(renji)

[Hmph. Have you forgotten the objective of this journey?]

“I haven’t.”

[I wonder about that.]

She seemed to sound more severe probably because I haven’t worked for the past few days at all. Basically because I have been lazing around like it was a holiday for me. As I gave a shrug at my partner’s voice, I looked outside the

window.

The weather seemed as clear as it could be but the air felt slightly humid. It might rain at noon or at night.

“It’s my loss.”(sol)

“Yes. Solnea-san, you’ve really gotten better at this.”(aya)

“I have not yet won against Aya though?”(sol)

“You won’t win that easily. You have to attain victory through your own hard work after all.”(aya)

“I see.”

While talking, those two began clearing up the chess pieces. I, who was bored, decided to simply admire the small blue bird in the meantime. When I put out my finger in front of it, it looked adorable as it jumped on to that finger. Was it under Utano-san’s control or did it actually have the consciousness of a bird as well? I don’t really know much about familiars but it looks like a normal bird to me right now. I gently caressed the bird with my finger.

[Now that I think about it, does Aya not have a familiar as well?]

“Yes. Even if it’s a familiar, it’s still a living being. And I am really bad with animals.”(aya)

“Is that so?”

“I do find small birds or cats cute but I’m a bit.....”

“What about dogs?”

“A long time ago, I was attacked by one so..”

I see so that’s why she’s bad with animals. Due to one incident she ended up not liking all animals as a whole, I guess. But it seems she was pretty embarrassed of that fact as her expression seemed shy as she said that.

“Also, the biggest problem is that I really don’t like controlling an animal against its will.....”(aya)

[I see.]

“Yeah, it’s fine that way.”

When I said that, she didn’t have anything more to say.

I’m sure with Aya’s magical energy she control literally anything.....except Gods and God’s descendants that is. Well, I am not knowledgeable about the fine details of contracting a familiar so I am not sure.

But from Aya’s reaction, I think my deduction wasn’t too far off the mark. And to be honest, I’m really happy to see that Aya thinks that way.

“Now then, what did Yuuko-san say in the letter?”(aya)

Having finished clearing away the chess pieces, Aya asked that. Her expression had changed from what it was when she was playing. Even her atmosphere, slightly changed.

“To take care of the griffins asap, that’s all.”(renji)

“I see.”

It seems her reaction was the same as mine, not very surprised. As the name, the Commercial city would suggest, commerce.....or rather, it was a vital point for trade. It has the only trade route with Elfreim and the place where goods to be exported out of Imnesia and imported from Elfreim gather.

And above all, it’s a city where humans, demihumans and beastmen all gather. If something happened to such a place, it’ll create problem between the two continents. That’s why, we were asked to urdently deal with this problem.

Seriously, she makes it sound as if its so easy.

“fufu.”

“hm?”

“It’s nothi——”

“Why is Renji smiling as well?”(sol)

For a second I didn't realize what Solnea was talking about? Wasn't Aya the one laughing? But I realized that the atmosphere was so that I was probably smiling as well. On being pointed that out by Solnea, I used my other hand, that didn't have the bird on it, scratch my cheek.

“Was I smiling?”(renji)

“yes.”(sol)

[Yeah. Looks like you're quite eager as well this time.]

“.....That's not it.”(renji)

I'm just feeling more at ease since we got an official order. No matter how difficult or absurd it might be, getting precise instructions always makes things easier.

But I doubt that has any connection to me feeling more eager about it. It won't make enjoy fighting, and I would never, voluntarily, start a fight myself. I hate getting hurt and have had enough of suffering from the pain. I want to avoid danger.

But if I'm told to do something, I will. Is this what they call being a person with naturally underling mentality?

“Well then, I’ll go and call Feirona-san and others.”(aya)

“Yeah, I leave that to you. I’ll head to the guild.”

“Understood.”

Saying that, Aya left the room. It’s amazing how fast she is to always take action like this. She understands what to do even without me telling her, or something like that.

Griffin subjugation. We can’t just head there instantly. First I have to let everyone know the details written in Utano-san’s letter, then make preparations as well. At earliest, we’ll do it tomorrow, it could even be the day after.

Feirona and others should be out on a job they got from the guild. There’s still time till they return. I’ll go and get Dagram to help me with the subjugation prep in the meantime.

“Renji.”

“What is it, Solnea.”

While I was in deep thought, Solnea who was still in the room spoke up. She might be confused to see me still here even though Aya left maybe.

“I’m also heading out soon, so what will you do in the meantime?”(renji)

“I’ll come with you.”(sol)

“Got it.”

[.....Instant reply, eh.]

Ermenhilde, as if trying to read my thoughts, spoke in a doubting voice. Is she wondering if I have some evil thought?

“If there’s something Solnea wants to do, I want to allow her that as much as possible okay?”(renji)

[fuun.]

“Why are you sulking now?”

[I’m not sulking. I just find it strange seeing Renji act so honestly/obediently.]

“What a partner I have, seriously.”

To start the preparations for travel—for battle, I stood up. That said, all I did was put on my mantle, hiding the throwing daggers on me, attaching the dragon bone knife to my belt and the mithril sword to my waist.

“So, what will you be doing?”(renji)

I spoke that towards the small bird resting in the top of my bed. When I did,

as if it understood me, it flew lightly and landed on my shoulder.

Though you see such a scene in tv dramas a lot, in actuality, birds are very wary creatures. The fact that they'd land on a person's shoulder is proof that they're very used to the person.

Well, considering it's Utano-san's familiar it should be obvious though. But still, I felt happy.

"Alright, let's go shall we?"(renji)

[.....what if it flies away due to the crowd and noise outside?]

"If that happens, it'll still just go back to Utano-san."

[I guess so.]

Picking up my cloth bag that I use as purse, I cleaned up the room first a bit.

"Now that I think about it.."

While clearing up the things, I turned towards Solnea who was gazing at me dazedly as usual.

"What do you think of chess. Enjoying it?"(renji)

"I am not sure."



“That’s pretty vague.”

“is that so?”

Sitting down, she held the bad with the chess board and pieces within her slender arms. From the time I bought her that, she’s always held it like that as if it was treasure.....I think.

At least, I have never seen her hold anything this preciously before.

“Didn’t Aya compliment you on your skill as well?”(renji)

“Yes...”

As if she didn’t understand what I meant, she replied in a vague sounding voice.

Though it’d look like she has changed a lot while living in Merdiores, she actually hasn’t changed at all. As usual, her expression is difficult to read, she speaks less, and would never say what she wants. At least she’s started to ask about things she’s interested in. and even that doesn’t happen much when with Feirona and others.

Even today, she didn’t say that she wanted to play chess. But because she was carrying the bad around with a face that seemed to be wanting to say something, Aya was the one who invited her to play together. While feeling slight uneasy whether this pace of growth was fine or not, I couldn’t think of

any better solution either.

I wonder how it was like with Eru.

These days, I've been thinking that a lot. I think.....and then feel sad due to being unable to remember such details. Memories are of the past. Who was it that said that humans should leave the past and head to the future? Did I read it on the Net, or was it in a book? Or maybe a friend or family member told me? Everytime I think of Eru, those words pop up in my mind.

It made me extremely sad, yet at the same time, I felt that I didn't feel as depressed I thought I would. Is that kind of relationship people have with their past? Even though it concerns yourself, it starts feeling like it does not matter to you any longer.

"Is that what it was?"(sol)

"hm?"

"Was I being praised?"

"Yeah. She was definitely praising you."

When I was going into deep thoughts again, Solnea's voice brought me back.

And I smiled wryly at her way of speaking.

As she tilted her head in confusion due to not realizing other people's good intentions, due to her good looks as well, she looked cute. From here onwards, she'll show interest in a lot more things, converse more, and understand emotions. When she does, I wonder how Solnea would change.

Or would she remain the same?

"You really should speak up more about what you want to do."(renji)

"Is that so?"

"Yeah. It'll be helpful to me as well."

"I understand."

As I left the room after confirming all of my equipment, Solnea followed after me. The bag with the chess board was still held close to her chest making me smile.

"You can leave that in the room. You don't want to drop it and break it right?"(renji)

"yes."

Giving an obedient reply, she went back into the room.

"She's like a docile child."

[Do you really want such a big kid?]

“No way.”

Even if an adventurer has a child, that child will only face misfortune. If you want to have a child, do it after you stop being an adventurer. Resting my back on the wall of the inn, I folded my arms.

“Even now, I already have my hands full with acting like a babysitter. If the number of kids increase further, I won’t be able to handle it.”

[if Aya heard that, lightning will fall on you, you know?]

“I never said ‘who’ were included in kids though?”

[Muu.]

Shouldn’t Mururu be the one you think of at first? Well, for Ermenhilde I guess Aya’s also still a child.

“Sorry to have kept you waiting.”(sol)

“Don’t mind it. Now then, let’s get going.”(renji)

Together with Solnea who came back from the room, we headed down towards the first floor of the inn—when, I felt a sensation on my mantle. As

usual with a emotionless expression, Solnea held on to the edge of my mantle.

Now if she had held on to it with just her finger or something, it'd be really cute but seeing her hold on properly with her whole hand was well, very Solnea-like to do so.

“What is it?”(renji)

“Renji, will you play chess with me later?”(sol)

“Wha?”

Due to the sudden comment, I couldn't even reply back properly.

“.....Why?”(renji)

“Just now, didn't you say to tell what I wanted to do?”(sol)

[Indeed.]

“Don't you ‘indeed’ me damnit.”(renji)

I lightly hit my partner who was some incomprehensible things from above my trousers.

Even if you tell me to play chess with you now..Let alone Aya, I'm weaker than even Feirona at it. I am not sure if I can win against her. I honestly have zero

confidence of winning.

“Aya and Feirona are both stronger than me you know?”(renji)

“Strong or weak is not relevant to me when playing chess with them though.”(sol)

“Really?”

“Yes.”

I don't get it. Then why is she playing chess.....well, I guess you could say that she just enjoys playing that's all. But in that sense does the opponent's strength really become irrelevant?

“Well, if you're okay with me, sure.”(renji)

“I see.”

[Shouldn't be really difficult for you to win against her now, Renji?]

“I think so. But if she doesn't mind that, I don't mind playing with her.”

“I'll be looking forward to it.”

But well, it's going to get really busy for sometime so the chess match will have to be put off for later though.

“I’ll get really busy for some time so it’ll be a while till I get to play with you but, is that fine?”(renji)

“I do not mind.”

“I see. Okay, then let’s head to the guild now.”

Saying that, I began to walk. This time she didn’t pull on my mantle.

Leaving the inn and reaching in front of the guild, I passed through the swinging double doors as the noise of the adventurers came to me. Even though the threat of Griffins was there, it’s not like adventurers don’t have any other job.

True, the damage from monsters like harpies and goblins has lessened but adventurers also have other jobs like escorting merchants, and gathering herbs and ingredients for magic and alchemy as well. The profits will be less but they’ll still be busy with such jobs. Some the adventurers saw me come in and looked towards me. Some of them, who were an acquaintance of mine, raised their hand and gave a greeting. I greeted them back but other than those gazes there were also some which were more focused behind me. That is, they were looking towards Solnea. Rather than a simple man like me, a beautiful girl like her is a better treat for their eyes after all.

“Oi, Dagram.”

“You’re finally here, Renji. Since it was you, I thought you’d be here first thing in the morning.”

“huh?”

[fumu. Did something happen?]

When I spoke up to Dagram who was at one of the counters looking bored, he suddenly told that to me. When I tilted my head confused at what he meant, he also got confused seeing my reaction.

“What? Aren’t you here to accept the griffin subjugation request?”(dagram)

“Well, yeah I am but, why did you say I’d be here first thing in the morning?”

“Well, that’s because a letter from the capital came here last night.”

“.....is that so?”

“You didn’t know?”

“Yeah, an acquaintance at the capital.....Utano-san’s letter came to me only a while ago after all.”

Looks like a letter was sent to the guild through another route as well. Then couldn’t they have told me the same last night as well?

But I guess they didn’t have time to send someone to me. Not to mention they must have thought that I’d be here sooner or later anyway.



“What the hell? Even though the letter to me came from some damned old man , you got one from a woman? As usual, you make me jealous.”(dagram)

“Let me off. Here, I am supposed to write back a letter telling the current circumstances you know? Me, write a letter? There’s a limit to how much that doesn’t suit me.”

“yeah, I guess so. Just imagining you sitting in front of a desk writing a letter, it really doesn’t suit you at all.”

“Well if we’re talking about that, you working at the reception doesn’t suit either though.”

“Shaddup. Who do you think has been kindly offering all sorts of good jobs to your comrades, huh?”

While I was talking with Dagram like that, the little bird sitting on my shoulder lightly poked at my cheek. Getting surprised, I stopped talking and it became calm again.

Is it telling me to finish things here quickly?

“Hm, the hell is that bird?”(dagram)

“Utano-san’s familiar. This is the one who brought me the letter.”

“Houu, since this is Ane-san we’re talking about I was sure her familiar would

be some demonic beast.” (T/N: Ane-san technically means older sister but is also used for women who are confident and dominating types sometimes.)

“Even though she’s like that, she really likes cute——”

I spoke till that when the little bird started pecking at my cheek again. This time, it was actually serious and it really hurt making me raise my voice.

“Kakaka. Looks like the master and the familiar are one and the same. What the familiar sees and hears also reaches the master, that is her, Renji.”

“That doesn’t mean the familiar has to get angry as well.”

Though I’m also stupid to still say such things even while knowing that but how devoted is this familiar to Utano-san.

When I was thinking of that, it started pecking at me again. This habit of always making others rush is also similar to its master.

“I and the people around me will be troubled if I were to rush anything though.”(renji)

“But then again, you take a bit too much time with things as well.”

[umu. It’s exactly as he says, Renji.]

“What will I gain by rushing things? If I keep on running looking just ahead, I’ll

miss all the beautiful scenery around me.”

[I feel like Renji get’s a bit too captivated by the scenery and completely stops moving most of the time though.]

Isn’t it fine though? Beautiful scenery, clean air, idyllic atmosphere. I love all of it. Looking at me holding my head, both Dagram and Ermenhilde laughed out loud. Goddamn it.

“So, you’re accepting the griffin subjugation quest?”(dagram)

“.....yeah. We’ll start tomorrow at noon. So make sure that as few as possible people leave Merdiore during that time.”

“Looks like you’re planning to have a pretty intense battle.”

“Aya is with us after all.”

When she fights seriously, it’s really bad for people to be anywhere near. Honestly speaking, even I become nothing more than a burden at that time.

I gave a shrug but Dagram gave a tired sigh. As a veteran adventurer, or rather, as someone who were in Merdiore two years ago, he knows very well just what level of magicians both Aya and Koutarou are. After all, it was these two that blew away one whole section of that bare mountain that the Griffins have made into their nest right now.

But still, it’s nowhere near like the time in Abenelm where they’d create

craters at every place they go.

“Well, I’ll try and do something. Think it’ll take a lot of time?”(dagram)

“Can’t say. I went quite a lot of times to observe the griffins but that Arch griffin alone didn’t show itself.”

If it was just simple griffins, it’ll end pretty fast but without confirming exactly how old and how skilled that Arch griffin is, I can’t say anything for sure.

Of course, it’ll still be nowhere near the Demon God Nayfell’s level though.

Even if I wanted to hear more about that arch griffin, the ones who barely returned alive last time from fighting it also succumbed to their wounds and died the other day.

Even if they were adventurers, death still felt sad. Without letting such emotions show too much on my face, I gave a sigh.

[I couldn’t even tell even the normal griffins apart though.....]

Are you still talking about that?

“This will be slightly troublesome I know but I leave it to you.”(renji)

“It’s not just ‘slightly’ damnit. Just how many people do you think come and go through the highway everyday??”(dagram)

“.....Ugh..”

[How many?]

“Who knows? I can’t tell without properly looking into it. But it’s a big number I’m sure.”

“Oi.”

If you don’t even know, don’t tell me that! Looking fed up towards my comrade who hadn’t changed at all, he gave his sultry smile.

[muu]

And as if it was pre-established fact, a voice of disgust came instantly from Ermenhilde.

Now then, all that’s left is too meet up with Aya and the others and prepare for tomorrow. Looks like tomorrow will be really busy. I muttered to myself.

Towards me, as if trying to console me, the small blue bird tweeted softly.

## Chapter 70: A Small, Small Step

That house looked so worn out that it felt like a strong wind alone could blow it away. At the edge of Merdiore, it was built on a cliffside with sea nearby so the wind felt really pleasant. The view from here was also great and if not for the graveyard so nearby, it would be a perfect location. Just from the looks of it, it felt like a punch alone could open a hole in the wall of the house and , it really felt like the quality of the house didn't matter much to its inhabitants. Well, it could be that I am simply not aware of some great aspect to this house as well though.

This house is where Yuuichirou was currently living. Or rather, it's a place that has been used by the gravekeepers as a home for many generations. Since he told that himself, it shouldn't be wrong but because it looked like this I still was left really surprised.

If he were to ask the country.....no, if he had even asked Dagram, they would have prepared a much better house for him though.

Or perhaps there was some personal attachment to this house? While thinking, I lightly knocked on the worn out door which had clearly seen many years pass by. I was almost afraid that I might break it down if I used too much strength.

"Ah, welcome Yamada-san."

"Yo, Yuuichirou, mind if I come in for a while?"

The owner of this house, Enomiya Yuuichirou opened the door.

Gray hair, tanned skin, and dark purple eyes. He was tall, and though he didn't look much like a Japanese person, this wasn't because he wished to change his appearance to Astraera like Koutarou did. He himself doesn't pay much attention to it anymore but long back he was very conscious of his looks. Back in our world, apparently he had also been bullied due to it or so I have heard.

His clothes were also simple old looking clothes, and he looked more like a commoner than even me. Well, it's not like we're competing for it or anything though.

"Sure but.....It's a pretty small house though."(yuu)

"I don't mind."

Saying that, he let me inside. From outside, the place seemed to be in tatters but inside, it was well kept and the place was tidy. I didn't feel the cold breeze I was feeling outside either so they must have properly taken measures against wind coming as well it seems. And the house didn't even make creaking noises from the strong wind either so it seems the house is more well maintained than I first thought.

The furniture was minimalistic, a lamp, tableware and some cooking tools could be seen.

"Ara?"

As I observed the house without making it seem rude, Seravi-san, whom we met a few days ago, came out from an inner room. Wearing just a simple cotton tunic and a long skirt, she totally looked like a normal town girl but unlike her older sister, she had a more calm atmosphere around her which suited her more.

Looks like she came out from the bedroom just now. Judging by how she was putting her hair in order with her fingers, she must have woken up just now. Even though it's noon already. To be asleep till so late, what have they been doing till late last night? Should I be delighted for my comrade's happiness or should I be jealous of it?

“Welcome Renji Yamada-sama.”(sera)

“Hello, Seravi-san. Also, I dislike being referred to with a ‘-sama’ honorific so please call me in some other way if possible.”

As I said that while greeting her, she made a troubled look and turned towards Yuuichirou. And he just gave a small laugh and nodded in reply.

Wow, they can communicate through just their gazes. Realizing my gaze, Yuuichirou scratched his cheek embarrassedly and averted his eyes. It doesn't look cute at all when a guy does that.

“Yamada-san, please sit down, there's no need to stand as we talk right?”(yuu)

As he spoke that quickly trying to hide his embarrassment, I took a seat. Realizing that I could totally see through him, he also gave a wry smile and sat



down.

From back then, Yuuichirou had been bad at hiding his own feelings. Even if he remained silent, the movements of his body or slight change in expression would totally give it away. Now I can't exactly guess what he's always thinking but I can tell when he's panicking or when he's having fun.

It becomes even more obvious when you get close to him and it was also proof that he didn't have his guard up around me which made me happy.

"Will you be fine with tea?"(sera)

"Ah, please don't worry too much about it. I came empty handed as well after all."(renji)

When I raised my hands saying that, she gave a laugh. Yeah, she definitely is Celestia's sister. Her laughing face did seem similar to Celestia.

"So? Yuuichirou, when and how did you become so close with Seravisan?"(renji)

Putting my elbow on the table, I asked Yuuichirou about his romantic life with a teasing smile. Realizing my intentions, Yuuichirou made a troubled yet somewhat happy face and looked outside the window.

"You're asking that again.....I haven't really done anything special you know?"(yuu)

“Fuun.”

“What’s with that smile of yours?”

“I was born with it, don’t worry.”

“Seriously.”

Ad, he sighed. But seeing as his cheeks were light, it wasn’t like he didn’t want to talk about it either. I guess most people do enjoy proudly telling others how their romance started with their lover.

“After Yamada-san disappeared from the capital, I came to this area. Because I had heard that Celestia-san was a resident of this place.”(yuu)

I don’t know if his feelings have been already resolved or still in the process of it, but from the way he was able to easily say her name, it looks like he has gotten over Celestia-san’s death. Compared to me who still can’t come to talk about Eru’s death, this 18yr old sitting in front of me looked more mature than me.

Do children really mature this fast? Or am I still just a child? Thinking that, I breathed out.

“What’s wrong?”(yuu)

“Nothing. So, did you look for Celestia-san’s house after coming here?”

“Yes. That said, her family was already—-”

Saying till there, he looked towards Seravi-san. She had her back towards us and was preparing some tea. And she was lightly humming as well. When I met her a few days ago, I thought she might be the gloomy type but this should be her actual personality I think. So was she just get too anxious around strangers?

And the meaning behind Yuuichirou’s gaze, it hit on me, and I just muttered ‘I see.’

It seems Celestia only had her younger sister in the family. I don’t know what happened to her parents but back then, monsters were far more aggressive. And considering how she was the vice commander of a mostly male knight order, I understood what that meant even if I didn’t want to.

“So that’s how you met eh?”(renji)

“Yes.”

I’m sure they probably didn’t get along much when they first met. Having lost her only family, blood relative, sister; how many would allow a man who just travelled with her sister for a while into their lives?

Yuuichirou didn’t talk much about it but I can imagine.

“She seems like a really good person.”(renji)

“Really. In fact, I feel like she’s too good for me.”(yuu)

“No such thing. You’re a good guy as well. Have more confidence in yourself.”

When I replied that instantly, he looked at me surprised then averted his eyes and scratched his cheeks in embarrassment.

Crying for others and putting your own life on the line for others. It only sounds easy but Yuuichirou, who actually did it, I know he’s a good guy. For that reason, he even lost an arm and Celestia-san lost her life. But still, he’s can smile like this right now. I was very surprised yesterday, but really, this is a delightful thing. When I laughed, he shook in his seat uncomfortably.

“And your job as a gravekeeper?.....”(renji)

“It’s for Celestia-san’s grave. After all, in the end we were unable to bring her body back.”

Talking till that, hmm, I stretched my body a bit.

“But still. Isn’t this place a bit too dangerous to live for two people?”(renji)

Raising a different topic I implicitly told that the gloomy talk was over.

Looking towards the ceiling, though it might survive the wind and rain, I could clearly see some parts of the wood really worn out. I feel bad to say this, but really it looks like it might fall down any second.

“Once we’ve saved up a bit more money, we plan to renovate the

place.”(yuu)

“I see. Though couldn’t you just ask Dagram or someone to lend you money?”(renji)

When I named my dwarven friend, Yuuichirou gave a wry smile saying ‘that might be so’.

The receptionist-cum-adventurer Dagram has a lot of savings, and he also has a strong sense of feeling of moral obligation. If Yuuichirou asked even once, he’d give him money instantly.

“Well, this house has its own good parts as well.”(yuu)

“Really?”

“Yeah. Since it’s so small, you can always tell where the other person is and even speaking in a small voice reaches the other person.”

Fumu, I nodded.

“And above all, since the winter nights are cold, you have to stick really close with each other at night when sleeping.”

The moment Yuuichirou said that, with a loud *kacha* a teacup was placed in front of him.

“Here.”(sera)

“yeah.”(yuu)

Her gaze was incredibly cold and you couldn't tell that these two were lover living together. The person who had been pleasantly humming just a moment ago seemed like a completely different person.

After a moment's gap, a teacup was placed in front of me as well without making even a single sound.

Feeling the difference, I ended up laughing out.

“I hope it suits your tastes.”(sera)

“Thank you very much.”(renji)

To me, she spoke with her eyes down looking shy. Well she actually is embarrassed I think. After all, in front of a man she barely knows, he just talked openly about such things.

Acting like I didn't notice it all, I simply gave my thanks.

“Mouu, please don't talk about such weird things.”(sera)

“But..”(yuu)

Without swaying even a bit from her gaze, Yuuichirou took a sip from the steamy tea.

Let alone look discomposed, he seemed to be in fact enjoying her reactions. Even though he was always cowering back then, he really has gotten strong. While admiring him, I took a sip from the tea as well.

“..we’re so happy right now. I just end up telling everyone.”(yuu)

“yeah yeah, go explode you goddamn riajuu!”(renji ) (T/N:google riajuu if unaware)

Or rather, his character was way too different from what I remember. Is this the power of love? I ended up thinking of such stupid things.

Or maybe, this was his true nature. Being bullied in our world, and going through such a brutal journey in this world. He was always depressed. That was the Yuuichirou I knew.

It’s been a little more than two years since Celestia died. I can’t tell exactly how long but it should be around that much. There’s also the saying that time heals the wounds of your heart as well I guess. But it was nothing more than words. The person himself must try to overcome those wounds, in fact sometimes time only makes those wounds deeper.

At least Yuuichirou was the latter. After Celestia died, he became the [Avenger]. To Yuuichirou whose power comes from anger and the wounds on his body, his current situation is what he wishes for yet at the same time that also becomes the restraint to his full power.

I also understood why Dagram and the others had victims in their subjugation group against the griffins as well as why they haven't been able to completely kill them all. That's because Yuuichirou never took part in the subjugation in the first place. That's because he won't be of any use right now. It's something to be glad of yet also slightly complicated seeing that the threat of monsters was still present in this world.

"Well, even Yamada-san has been living a fulfilling life everyday, right?"(yuu)

"You think so?"

"Well, you're even travelling together with Aya right?"

"that's, well,"

I ended up vaguely replying to that. Averting my gaze from him, I looked outside the window. The weather was as clear as it could be but right now, shining sun almost felt hateful.

Even though when he was travelling with us he was a silent and docile boy, now he's become able to talk back like this, joke like this and laugh from the bottom of his heart.

.....he's completely changed, but right now he's much more lively. I felt so.

"Oh right, where's Eru-san?"(yuu)



“I didn’t bring her. She’s been scolding me more and more lately.”

“Well that’s because you do things that invite scolding after all.”

“Maybe so.”

I don’t think that a person’s personality is decided the moment he’s born. It’s slowly formed as he/she lives on.

Then, the existence called Ermenhilde. Her personality was also created through the one year she has been living with me and the fact that she scolds so much is because I have been lazing around that much I guess.

“As usual, you two get along so well.”(yuu)

“Not really. I have to deal with her tiring scolding everyday you know?”

“If you two weren’t close, she wouldn’t be scolding you in the first place though.”

“I guess, that’s true as well.”

Well, it’s troubling to think that the amount of scolding is a measure to judge how close you are to someone though. But let’s leave that aside for now.

“How rare. Back then, you would always be together with Eru-san.”(yuu)

“I don’t think so……probably.”

I replied instantly to Yuuichirou’s comment but I myself felt that I lacked persuasiveness. That’s because I know the truth very well.

Yeah, that’s right. I was always with her. Recalling that, I smiled wryly. Whether in a city, travelling or fighting, it was normal for us to be together and though this might just be my own personal impression but……I felt that her connection to me was even stronger than Astraera’s. I really think so.

But that was that. Right now, I’ve gotten used to moving around alone without Ermenhilde as well.

Should I be happy that my private time has increased or should I be sad that I’ve started to be away from Ermenhilde at times? No matter how much I think about it, I won’t get an answer. That’s because my own self is resisting finding the answer to that.

“Did something happen?”(yuu)

“……You can tell?”

“Somewhat.”

“I see.”

I muttered. I didn’t think I let it show on my face but maybe I am the only one who thinks that.

I took a deep breath and strength left my body.

“Eru died.”

“.....”

When I said that, I felt more strength leave my body. As if these arms weren't my own, I put down the still half filled teacup on the table.

“Is that why, you left alone on a journey back then?”(yuu)

Yuuichirou said that, and at the same time he gave an eye signal to Seravi san. She , reading the mood, quickly left the room.

“then, the one who was with you was.....”(yuu)

“What I revived by begging to Astraera—I'm calling her Ermenhilde now.”

“I see. Yes, true. Back then, Yamada-san, you always called her ‘Eru’ after all.”

We were silent for a while.

What the hell am I saying? I questioned myself. I didn't come to Yuuichirou's home to talk about this. The subjugation of griffins. I came here to ask for his help, then why am I talking about myself here.

I'm sure when I saw Yuuichirou and Seravi-san so happily living like this, I couldn't hold myself back. The reality of Eru's death that I've been keeping to

myself. They say time heals the wounds of the heart. I guess it is true.....As long as there's someone who'd support you during the time, those wounds will heal one day.

But.....I was a fool, trying to carry that burden alone. But that only made the wound deeper as it gouged into my heart. Yet, time keeps on stealing away my memories of people dear to me, of Eru. Even though I clearly remember I lost her, I still can't remember much about her anymore. That reality would one day become unbearable to me.

And when I finally do become unable to bear it, what would happen? Will I go on a rampage like Yuuichirou did back then? Or would I get over it?

"Shit! Don't tell anyone else, okay? Other than you, only Utano-san and Koutarou know of this."(renji)

"Haa? Then why did you tell me?"

"I don't know! Because you seemed so happy, my tongue just slipped."

"Normally, shouldn't you tell Aya before me? If we're speaking of priority, that is."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?....."

Covering my face with my right hand, I gave a deep sigh. Seriously, what the hell am I doing?

Even though I never wanted to tell this to him, I couldn't even control my emotions and ended up saying it all. The phrase 'there's no use crying over spilt milk' sure is apt.

"I'll see you later. Right now, I'm very busy with the request from Astraera. I'll come meet again once I'm done."(renji)

".....No, why did you come here in the first place then?"(yuu)

"Forget about it!"

Getting up from my seat, I left Yuuichirou's 'love nest'. No, it should be better to say that I ran away. When, Yuuichirou came after me out of the house as well. His left sleeve swayed emptily in the air.

"What you just told me, have you really not told that to even Aya?"(yuu)

"Yeah. I still haven't told her. I haven't even told Ermenhilde either. She, remembers that we journeyed together but she doesn't remember anything that happened between me and her."

"—I see."

His shoulder dropped down. Was I because he understood that one of his former comrades had completely changed?

We, have become too used to death. Too many people died, comrades died, friends died. We saw that reality too many times. And, Eru's death was also

nothing more than just one of those. I should have also treated it like that as well. There was never a reason to hide Eru's death in the first place. I should've just shared it with everyone and supported each other.

But, I took it all on myself and disappeared from their side. Eru's death, and her will as Ermenhilde. I just couldn't endure it all. That's why, I raged. So much that I almost died multiple times in just half a year.

I don't understand. Back then, why did I keep Eru's death just to myself? Why did I hide it from everyone?

I wished to be a Hero. But I never could become one. I sacrificed so many people, I let so many people dear to me die, and only then was I able to fight a God. And that me.....still couldn't protect the one thing I really wanted to protect. How could I ever become a Hero like that?

I just wanted to look away from that reality. Or maybe I just didn't want to accept that Eru was dead.

"But, 'still' means that you do plan on telling them one day right?"(yuu)

".....Yeah. Once this journey ends, I will."

"I see. Then, I'll keep quiet as well."

"Sorry."

Seriously. What am I saying to a kid who's ten years younger than me? I scratched my head and tried to change my thoughts. Seeing others' happiness,

to start talking about my own true feelings. It's really not how an adult should act. I felt disgusted just from all the self-hate.

"Well then, please come to visit us again. There's nothing much to do here though."(yuu)

"That's not true. I never thought one day you'd be bragging about your wife to me. It was fun."

"I wasn't really doing that though....."

Saying that, Yuuichirou gave an embarrassed smile making me sigh. It's too late for that you know.

Well, but still I never expected to be able to talk like this with Yuuichirou and rather than surprise, the feeling of happiness was more. As expected, I really do love to feel others' happiness.

"Yeah, I'll come show up again. Stay healthy and safe. And do your best with your work, okay?"(renji)

"Yes."

I decided not to tell him about the griffins. Since he's finally living his life happily, I don't want to invite him to danger again.

I have Aya with me and trustworthy comrades as well. Then, we will be the ones who take on the troublesome things. For Yuuichirou to fight, he needs to get wounded first. That'll make Seravi-san worry for him. I don't want to make him fight so much that'd I make someone else worry or cry.

“See you later.”

Saying that, I walked away.

Now then, I'll have to work hard enough for his part as well. I don't really specialise in fighting too willingly though.

“Yamada-san, do your best.”(yuu)

That voice was too low and though it was meant for me, it wasn't loud enough to actually let me hear it properly. That's why, I also went along and acted like I didn't hear it and continued walking forward.

Those words went deep into my heart. I felt neither objection nor embarrassment to it. Probably because those words came from Yuuichirou who had overcome his pain.

I'll do my best. Saying that in my mind, I took a small, small, really, very small step ahead.



## Chapter 71: King of Griffins ①

The sun had not yet begun to rise, and inside my dark room I unsheathed my mithril sword and checked its blade under the light of the lamp. I never got the sword chipped while in Merdiore in the first place so there should be no problem but it's just a uncontrollable habit of mine to check it anyway before an actual fight.

That's probably because I love swords. Checking its condition, I maintained it properly. I feel like when I'm doing this, I am calm inside.

Sitting down on the floor, spreading out a piece of cloth, I lay all my weapons on top of it. Including the daggers and knife. Picking up each one by one, I cleaned the blade with a new piece of cloth and removed any stains that might have been on the blade. But they weren't that dirty in the first place so I finished pretty quickly. Picking up one of my daggers, I gave it a swing and the sound of the air getting cut by its sharp blade reached me. Satisfied from that pleasant, familiar sound, I put the dagger back in its sheath.

The dragon bone knife, as its name would suggest was made out by carving and shaping the bone of a dragon, so its blade looked pretty rough but its edge was much sharper than even a normal sword. To test its sharpness, I pushed it on my finger nail and it cleanly, without much resistance, cut the tip of my nail.

After checking every weapon like this, I took in a breath, and then slowly, with ease, breathed out. When I picked up the mithril sword to put it back in its sheath, the door was knocked on.

“I’m coming in.”

“Sure.”

Saying that, the one who entered was Feirona. Even though it was still so early in the morning, there was no sign of sleepiness on his face. On his back was a bow and quiver and a sword on his waist. This look, that I had grown used to seeing, still made me feel confident as well.

“There’s still time before we set out but, how’re the preparations going?”(elf)

“Yeah, I’m almost done.”

“I see.”

Feirona took off his weapons and sat down on the bed. While seeing him, I took out Ermenhilde out of my pocket. Gripping the gold medal in my palms, faint jade green magical energy leaked out from it and turned into a sword in my hand. The blade was pure white as if it was made of silver and it shone under the light of the lamp.

Only one of my covenants was released right now. Even though I’m supposed to be fighting griffins soon, this really makes me uneasy. The only covenant released was my fighting will but that really made me feel complicated.

[What?]

“nah, just thinking that the blade was really pretty as usual.”

[fufu, I see.]

When I gave my honest impression, Ermenhilde clearly spoke up happily. Well, if she's happy that's good as well.

"What about you? Are you done with the prep?"(renji)

"yeah, no problem here. That said, this is my first time fighting a griffin. I'm not sure what I'd need against them either."

As I asked that to Feirona, he replied back in a relaxed voice. There was no sense of unease or over eagerness in his voice.

I was amazed to see him so relaxed even when he's about to fight against an enemy that he's never fought before.

"Don't worry too much. With your skills, it won't be much of problem."(renji)

"Being told that by you does make it more reassuring."

"Well, that's great then."

Saying that, I shined Ermenhilde's blade under the lamp. The temper line of the sword was as straight as it could have been, without a single bend. Though it's not as sharp as Masaki-chan's blade, it can still easily cut apart goblins and Orcs like butter.

“And, how’s your own condition?”(elf)

“As usual. I so scared to fight that I’m shaking.”

“Fuh, well that’s reassuring as well.”

“Oh leave me alone.”

Replying that, I averted my gaze from the Divine blade in my hand. And the sword dissipated into green magical energy.

“It’s very like you to be the same as usual even before a big fight I guess.”

“What? Did you want me to be actually more nervous?”

“No way. If you started acting nervous, it’ll disrupt my mood as well.”

“What an unfair remark.”

Giving a small laugh, I stood up. Putting away the items I used to inspect my equipment, I cracked my neck once.

“Now then, what about ms Francesca? You guys have been with her for the past few days right?”

“Look forward to it. She worked really hard together with Mururu so that she could surprise you.”

[fufu. To surprise him, eh?]

“Well, can’t wait to see that.”(renji)

I looked outside the window. The sun will begin to rise soon.

It’s about time when Aya and others woke up as well. After getting breakfast first, then meeting up with ms Francesca, we’ll make camp in the plains near the bare mountain and annihilate those griffins.

Honestly, I hoped to have Yuuichirou’s strength with us as well but he’s finally settled down with a woman and is walking on to a new path. It’d be boorish of me to be an obstacle to that.

Well, considering his personality, he wouldn’t have cared at all about it though.

But he’s also the type who hates fighting. That’s why he chose a job like gravekeeping that doesn’t require him to use the powers of a Hero. He might have accepted if I had asked but that’s slightly different from him voluntarily accepting it I think.

Now knights and adventurers have to fight continuously because it’s their job but making someone fight solely because he’s strong is——or maybe I’m being naïve here as well. But even while knowing that, I didn’t ask Yuuichirou to fight means that even I still have lots to learn. If I was hoping to keep danger to a

minimum, I should have relied on Yuuichirou, I understand that very well.

“Then, let’s see if she has what it takes.”(renji)

“Don’t make her do something too rash though.”(elf)

“I know. If I let such a good girl get injured, her father would kill me.”

I recalled Leonhart, [Ms Francesca’s father]. For a merchant he was well built and I wouldn’t be surprised if someone said that he was an adventurer. In a pure competition of strength, I can very easily see thing go badly for me.

[He let Ms Francesca go understanding and accepting the risk and conditions so I don’t think you have to worry about that though.]

“I can’t be like that now can I? It’s not my hobby to see beauties get injured.”

[Nobody cares what your hobbies are.]

“hah, I guess so.”

Also, a battle is to put your life on the line. Your priority should be to stay alive till the end. Even I understand that.

When I gave shrug saying that I was just joking, Ermenhilde gave a really heavy sigh.

And after a while, the door was knocked on.

“Renji, Feirona, are you two awake?”

“Yeah.”

When I answered, the door opened.

It was Solnea who appeared. She had already changed out from her nightgown and was in her usual black one-piece dress. But, there was also a blue bird on her shoulder.

“So you’re awake already. The sun hasn’t even risen yet. Why not sleep a bit more?”(renji)

“Because Aya and others started moving around already. And it’s almost morning anyway so.”(sol)

“I guess that’s true as well.”

Giving a laugh, I sat down on my bed. Seeing me, Solnea also took a seat on one of the chairs in the room.

At the same time, the small bird on her shoulder flew up and sat down on mine. As it chirped right beside my ear, I gave a smile. Animals sure can be cute, really.

As I gently caressed its head with my finger it came closer as if it liked getting spoiled by me.

“What happened Solnea? I thought I told you that it’d be difficult to be with us for today, right?”

“I remember Feirona, but Aya and others said that we were going to take breakfast right now.”

“Oh so you came to call us, eh. Thanks.”

“Don’t mention it.”

So it’s already time. I was about to stretch my body but remembered that the small bird was on my shoulder and stopped halfway. Seeing me make such a half gesture, Feirona gave a smile and stood up and put his equipment back on. When I also stood up while also paying mind to the small bird, Ermenhilde gave an exaggerated sigh.

[Are you planning to take that bird with you as well?]

“No way. Solnea, take care of it while we’re gone okay?”

“Understood.”

When I said that, the blue bird flew back to Solnea’s shoulder. Was this the result of Utano-san’s training or had it become more intelligent simply from turning into a familiar? Either way, I’ll have it keep an eye on Solnea while we’re



away as well. It seemed like bird had understood me well.

“Now then, let’s do some proper work for once eh?”(renji)

“Seriously. You’ve been constantly away from guild work from the day we came to Merdior so be sure to work hard today.”(elf)

[umu. Make sure to work him hard.]

“.....No but, I did important stuff like confirming the number of Griffins etc you know?”

Why do they say things that’ll make me instantly uneager about this? While dropping my shoulders, I put on my mantle and seeing me like that Feirona in a low voice but clearly, laughed out. I wonder how much was he serious and how much was it just a joke.

“Don’t expect too much okay? There’s not much I can do here.”(renji)

“I know, of course. We’ll only ask you to do things that we know you can.”

“I wonder about that.”

When I gave a shrug, this time Ermenhilde was the one who laughed. Even though we’re about to go face a really dangerous beast, there was no sense of tension in our talks. While thinking that this was a good thing, I left the room.

“Renji.”

Just then, Solnea spoke up.

Wondering what was wrong I turned around to see her, in a rare moment.....well not sure of that but anyway, Solnea was making a somewhat meek face.

“What’s wrong?”(renji)

“Will you be fine?”

A very quiet voice reached my ears. Maybe because she came when I was checking my weapons, she was looking at my weapons with a curious gaze.

“What do you mean?”

“No, I heard that you will be heading to a battle soon so..”

Hearing that, I tilted my head confused at what had happened. I had already talked to her about the Griffin subjugation and though the enemy was a demonic beast, since we know it’s habits and weaknesses.....well, I did explain that we’d be fine.

There’s no certainty to anything but I do make sure to complete a job as safely as possible.

I had explained all that to her but was she still worried about something?

Glancing towards Feirona, maybe he sensed something from Solnea's reaction because he was currently resting his back to the wall and standing with arms folded. It seems he plans on waiting till this conversation ends properly.

"We haven't had our game of chess yet."(sol)

"Hm?"

At first I didn't get what she said.

Chess, chess? After that word rotated in my head for a while, I finally got what Solnea was saying and also realized the answer.

She's talking about how we talked about having that chess game yesterday but still haven't played yet.

"I see. Well, why don't we have that match after we return? Is that okay with you?"(renji)

"Yes."

When I said that, she gave a slight nod. She really is like an obedient child, not being selfish or wilful at all. Well, it'd be troublesome if I actually had such a big kid though. Being a father at my age doesn't suit me at all. Even though I do basically act as a substitute father to all the children.

“Please come back safely.”(sol)

“Su, sure.”(renji)

Since this was the first time she said something like that, I stuttered a bit. No wait I feel like she did say something similar when I went to participate in the tournament back at the capital but at that time the way she spoke felt like it was obvious for me to win or something.

Even though getting so surprised at her words should normally be considered rude, Solnea simply continued to stare up towards me without showing any change of expression.

Well this was a first. Rather than feel surprised at being stared by a beauty like this, I was honestly more surprised at this change in her. So as to regain my composure, I cleared my throat and took deep breaths. And Solnea continued look at me with emotionless eyes.

“I got it. I’ll be sure to come back safe.....It’s a promise.”

I was able to say that normally. No, should I say that those words came to me unconsciously.

It’s an old habit.

——I promise. To definitely fulfil it. To protect it. To return back safe. No matter how strong, big, or ferocious my opponent may be, because I promised, and to fulfil that promise.

[You sure about this?]

“hm?”

[I thought you always said that you won't make promises so easily? Using something like 'it's difficult to fulfil them' as an excuse.]

“It's fine. Now that I've said it, I'll keep it.”

[I see.]

Saying that, I walked off.

It must not be my imagination that Ermenhilde's voice seemed clearly more cheerful than usual.

Seeing me like that, Feirona didn't even try to hide his smile as he walked alongside me.

“How very reliable indeed.”(elf)

“Don't tease me too much. I'm just a weak little human after all.”

[And already, you're talking like that again.....]

“Well, I’ll moderately work hard I guess.”

I promise. I’ll work hard. Those are words I had been constantly avoiding for a while now.

It makes me really itchy but——to move forward, it’s a path, words I can’t avoid.

And finally as I came down to the first floor while thinking of such things, Aya and Mururu, who were already changed into their normal clothes, and Ms Francesca, who must have come here pretty early, were sitting on a table together having a chat.

Realizing we had come down the stairs as well, she, slightly nervously, gave a bow towards me. Seeing her like that made me recall how she was when we first made and I ended up laughing slightly. Compared to back then, Ms Francesca has grown up a lot. As people who travelled with her, we know that the best.

And we also know that if she keeps on working hard, she can grow even further.

“Good morning, Ms Francesca.”

“Good morning, Renji-sama.”

“What happened? We were supposed to meet up at the main gates right? Did you get too excited and not sleep or something?”(renji)

“.....fufu. You could say that.”(fran)

Maybe she felt something from my words, she removed her tense expression and gave a smile. I think she was probably thinking of the same thing as I was.

When I first met her, the next day after I saved her to be exact, I recalled how she was awake so early back then as well.

It was a nostalgic piece of memory. But others who didn't know of that could only look at her confused as to why she suddenly smiled like that. Well, she'd probably tell them if anyone were to ask though. It's not really some kind of secret after all.

“now then, let's quickly have our breakfast and head to work, shall we?”(renji)

“.....”

But when I said that, Mururu looked up towards me in a suspicious manner. I looked at others wondering if I said something strange but they didn't seem to show any reaction.

“What happened?”(renji)

“Did something happen?”(mururu)

Hmm. Unable to understand what she meant, I could only look back at her for

a while.

“Nothing really.”(renji)

“I see.”

And, when I said that, she didn't pay any more attention to it and turned away.

“Weird girl.”(renji)

“I'm not. Renji, you're just easy to understand.”(mururu)

“But you're definitely not though.”(renji)

Well, I guess even she does get easy to understand when it is anything concerning food.

I wonder if she picked up on something. Beastmen are very sensitive to the subtleties of emotions as well after all. But the fact that she didn't try to pursue it any further was very Mururu like indeed.

But still——

“It quite hurt to be called as easy to understand by you.”(renji)

“.....And, you were also rude in return.”(mururu)



“Well, sorry about that.”

When I gave an insincere apology, she lightly elbowed my side. I guess you can call such a relationship to be an intimate one as well.

.

.

The difference between demonic beasts and normal monsters, in my opinion, was similar to the relationship between humans and beastmen.

Demonic beasts were a more superior version that held the agility and the toughness of beasts. But unlike beastmen, they can even use magic—especially spirit magic that comes with the strong protection of the spirits. Griffins were the same.

A winged lion. It's claws could cut through even steel easily, they could run faster than horses, and could even fly. And they also had the divine protection of Sylph making them able to use wind type spirit magic.

Honestly speaking, even the biggest strongest Ogre in this continent would be put in a lower level than a griffin. The main reason being that they could fly. After all, human's can't fly. The protection of the Sylph helps them against arrows as well and because it was a winged demonic beast, it was excelled at moving in the air. It could easily dodged any normally thrown projectiles like stones or fireballs.

Now then how are you supposed to take them down?

First method was to depend on pure numbers to drag it down to the ground and kill it. It was the tactic Dagram and others used during the first subjugation. This method didn't require much specific planning. But at the same time, it was also equally dangerous.

And then there's was the other way, the one we'd be using today. That as to lure it out and then trap it. And so, to find bait to use for the lure, I was currently inside the woods.

"fuu."

Drawing the mithril sword out of its sheath, I faced the goblins that were hiding in a thicket. There were 2 of them. Both of them held a rusted, unmaintained knife in their hands.

"Renji-sama."

"I know."

I gave my sword a swing. Did it get more wary due to the sound of air cutting, the goblins clearly seemed to be putting all strength in their body. It was 2 vs 2. Ms Francesca held her short sword in a natural stance. The length of our swords were different but her stance seemed to be somewhat familiar to mine.

Loose. Her whole body seemed to be relaxed but her gaze was stuck to the

goblins so that she could instantly react to any kind of movement.

[Is there a need to be so cautious against such opponents?]

“Stuupid. If I let my guard down against mere goblins and got even slightly hurt, Aya would laugh at me.”

[I don't think she would but.....but yeah, she will shocked at least.]

“See? The image of Yamada Renji inside her would completely shatter if something like that happened.”

[I'm pretty sure that image already crumbled a long time ago and has been buried into the ground though.]

I guess so, I laughed.

“Ms Francesca, take the left side.”

“Fufu, yes.”

Both of us, at the same time, moved to either sides. Matching us, the two goblins also split to face us.

Now then, then goblin charged towards me without being on guard and with its momentum, it swung down its knife at me. Deflecting it away with the sword's broad part, I destroyed the goblin's balance.

Checking over at Ms Francesca's side, she used the moment where her short sword and the goblin's knife clashed to use her other hand to stab an ice dagger into the opponents chest.

How clever. Sword and magic. It looks easy to do but how many swordsmen or magicians can actually do that in a real battle? At the very least I think it'd be too difficult for me. That said, I can't use magic since I don't have even a speck of magical energy in me in the first place though. While moving my body, my mind was thinking of completely different things.

While still in my thoughts, I dodged the goblin aiming for me with minimal movement and guided it away. Downward swings, horizontal slashes, avoiding all such easy attacks, my back reached a tree. It must have thought of me stopping as an opportunity as it tried to stick its knife in me. I repelled that knife with the dragon knife I held in my other hand.

With a shrill sound, that rusted knife flew in the air. The goblin, confused, looked at its own hand having lost its weapon. I kicked its stomach and blew him towards Ms Francesca.

"Ms Francesca!"

I called her name. reacting to my voice, she turned this way and without panicking stabbed the goblin that flew over to her instantly. From the chest of the goblin that was only as big as an elementary schooler, the short sword stuck out. After spasming violently for a second, its body became lifeless.

"Looks like your reaction time has grown quite a lot as well."(renji)

“Really?”

When I said that, she made a happy expression as she withdrew her sword from the goblins body.

Her expression was still that of a lovely noble girl but what she was doing was monster extermination. The gap between the two things was so strong that I’m sure I’m not the only one who would get a complicated feeling inside.

It’s nice that she was smiling but she was still holding a blood stained sword in her hand as well.

“But still, why do we need goblins for the griffin subjugation?”(fran)

“For the bait.”

“But wouldn’t it be easier and safer to just buy orc meat from the market?”

“That would cost money and above all, it won’t be fresh meat.”

While answering to her questions, I picked up the goblins by the nape of its neck. Though small, they still weighed about 30Kg each. Holding one in both hands, it’s 60Kg weight load on me.

While pulling the goblins along, we left the place. Behind me, Ms Francesca sheathed her sword with a practised movement.

“You really have been using that sword for quite a while now right?”(renji)

“I guess so?”

“Has it not started to wear out yet?”

“That’s, well, yes but if I maintain it properly it’s very much useable.”

Saying that, she gently caressed the handle of the short sword lovingly. Looks like she’s quite attached to it but really, she’s been using it for 6 months now, it should be slowly starting to wear out by now.

Even if not, she had been practicing a lot with Feirona and Mururu these days as well. We’re in the middle of a job right now but I really should examine it later. Well, I’m also only slightly better than an amateur so there’s only little of what I can do in terms of maintenance.

It’d be better to show it Kudou. She still hasn’t returned to her house in Merdiore but seeing how she hates trouble, she’ll return as soon as the griffin problem is resolved.

I’m pretty sure she heard the details from Utano-san and decided not to return worried that she might get dragged into this mess as well. That’s the kind of woman she is. She understands my personality pretty well as well, you could say.

[You really treasure it a lot eh?]

“Yes. It’s one of my few treasures.”

“Calling a sword that can be bought from any store as treasure is quite unusual though.”

“Maybe so. But I think it depends on the person what they consider a treasure.”

[That’s true.]

“Yes.”

For some reason, Ms Francesca and Ermenhilde seemed to have come to some kind of mutual understanding. As a weapon and someone who treats weapons preciously, I guess they just connected well.

That said, it’s not like I’m one to talk. I do treat my partner very preciously and it was the same for the mithril sword, knife and the daggers as well.

But that, and clinging to a weakening weapon is two different things. I want to explain her that but.....how should I say it?

“Well, it’s too late to worry about the weapon though.”

I thought that but that’s nothing more than putting away a problem for later. Calling it a ‘problem’ might be an exaggeration though. I couldn’t remedy the situation right now anyway.

While talking like that, we soon reached the exit from the woods and the place where we separated from Aya and the others.

There my comrades were standing with almost 10 goblins already taken down. Even though we've only killed 2 in the same time. So fast. Half of those have huge holes in their chest though.

Aya must have blown them with her magic. So easy to understand.

"Sorry. We were a bit slow."(renji)

"nah, we came back just now as well."

"I see."

The conversation seemed similar to a couple meeting up for a date. That said, I doubt such customary type of conversation even exists in this world so it might be just my imagination as well.

While in such stupid thoughts, I threw the two goblins on the mountain of corpses as well.

"Now then,"

Taking a breath, I cracked my neck. And removing my gloves, I drew out my knife.



“I’m about to do something slightly disgusting so you might want to get away a bit Ms Francesca.”(renji)

“Eh?”

“He’s about to cut open the goblin corpses and lure the griffins out with the smell of blood.”

Mururu gave the explanation in my stead. Hearing that, Ms Francesca took a step back. Her expression was clearly stiff as well.

Though not showing it clearly, Feirona wasn’t making a very good expression either.

Griffins were carnivores and due to the effect of Sylph’s protection, their sense of smell was incredible. So the easiest way to lure out griffins was to use the smell of blood and flesh. The fresher the better. They’re not some gourmets but they are smart enough to tell the difference between fresh meat and meat bought from a store.

Thanks to that though, just gathering this many goblin corpses would be effective.

While explaining that, I kneeled down near one of the corpses.

“Eh, umm, let, let me help —“(fran)

“No need to force yourself. Go stand aside with Aya. Feirona you as well, go stand on top of a tree.”(renji)

“Should I just aim from there with my bow?”

“Just aim at the goblins that would also get attracted from the smell. Griffins won’t be affected by normal arrows.”

Saying that, I looked towards Aya who was sitting quite far away on top of a pretty big rock. Even if she has gotten used to killing and hurting monsters, she still isn’t used to seeing a corpse mutilated like this in front of her so she quickly goes away as far as possible.

And I don’t really consider that to be a bad thing either. Every person has something they just can’t get used to. In fact it’d be weird for a girl to actually get used to seeing a monster—that too a humanoid one, get split open like this.

Mururu was, well, she’s a beastwoman so its fine.

In Elfheim, everyone still lives by the principle of self sufficiency. Now though they won’t eat goblins that barely have flesh on them, Orcs and other creatures of its subspecies and other monsters are all precious food. They are taught how to cut open such creatures from childhood so there was no surprise.

“Should I help as well?”(mururu)

“Nah, it’d be bad if the smell caught to you. You should also stay a bit away.”

“Got it.”

An important point to keep note of was that if the smell stuck to you as well, you'll get noticed by the demonic beast due to their strong sense of smell. Since it couldn't be helped in my case, I'll be acting as decoy. Well, that's not a new thing for me though.

It was our fighting way from back then, I'll be the decoy and others would use the chance to strike and kill the monsters. It's dangerous, scary, and I don't want to die; I always thought that but once I got used to it, it ended up becoming our main way of fighting instead. I could even suppress my sense of fear with pure willpower as well.

.....to say it in a more embarrassing way, I thought that as long as I can trust my comrades, we could survive any situation.

While in such thoughts, I opened up the goblins stomach with my knife. I wonder since when did I stop feeling anything even while opening up corpses like this. It must be the same as how I got used to fighting and killing things as well. While thinking of such philosophical things, I cut open its belly and let the smell of blood spread in the air.

At least with this much smell around, it shouldn't be able to discern me alone. In the end, I used the water bag on my waist to wash my hands and put on my gloves.

[You've really gotten used to doing this eh?]

“How many times have I done this already? I'd get used to it even if I didn't

want to.”

[fumu.]

“Humans, whether for better or worse, are very adaptive creatures in that sense, Ermenhilde.”

I wonder if my usage of those words was apt here or not though. It feels like the crime scene of crazy serial murderer. It may sound weird seeing I am the one who did it but really, I want to at least put a blanket or something on top of these. But that would only make my own effort useless though.

“Ms Francesca.”

As I walked towards the females gathered together, I spoke up the name of the one I needed.

“We’re getting on top of trees as well.”(renji)

“Wh, Yes!”(fran)

[.....you’re already so nervous. Will you be fine?]

“I, I’ll be fine.”

There’s no need to be so nervous.....well, I guess anyone would be at their first time.

Aya and Mururu hid in a nearby bush and Feirona was on top of a tree with his bow ready at a point where the girls and the goblin corpse were both in his view.

And me and Ms Francesca climbed up right atop where the corpses were lying. While climbing on to a large branch, we waited for the griffins to come.

“Does it smell?”(renji)

“Eh?”

“The blood. I was right in it after all. If it smells bad, you can move a bit away.”

“Ah, no, it’s fine.....the smell isn’t that bad.”

The way she said it means that I still was smelling though. Was she kind or just honest? While thinking of that, I moved slightly away from her.

I can’t move too far away as we were sitting on a branch but this should be better, even if only slightly.

In contrast, even though Ms Francesca was so close to me, I couldn’t smell anything nice since the smell of blood had completely disrupted my nose. How sad.

“So, umm, what do we do next?”(fran)

“Once the griffins come down to eat the goblin corpses, we’ll jump down to stab them.”

“.....that’s it?”

“That’s it. It’s a simple but effective method.”

Saying that, I lightly caressed the handle of the mithril sword.

“Monsters and Demonic beasts. What do you think is the similarity in those two?”(renji)

“Similarity, is it?”(fran)

She spoke the question back like a parrot. Did the way I asked it wrong?

“They have a heart and think with their brains.”(renji)

“Ah.”

“Yes, same as humans. Once the heart or brain gets crushed, they die.”

And the goblin corpses were right below us. By jumping down from here, you could clearly aim for both heart or the brain. Right up top is a clear blind spot for the griffins.

No matter how strong the protection of Sylph they might have, it's a distance where they'd be too late to act even after noticing.

The [Arrow reflecting ward] may be able to deflect away light things like arrows but it can't divert heavy things like a human body. Basically, the [Ward] can't deflect things with great mass and weight.

I explained it all to ms francesca since we had nothing better to do till the griffins came. By the way, in the meantime, the number of dead goblins kept on increasing from Feirona's arrows.

".....haah."

"That's because magic has lots of weaknesses as well. Thinking around those is pretty interesting you know."

"And Renji-sama who can think of all that is pretty amazing as well though."

"Not really. I'm just a bit more open-minded than normal that's all."

Utano-san says that to me many times as well. Was it a compliment?

While I was thinking of that, Feirona, who was in my view, averted his gaze from the goblin corpses and turned towards the mountain. Following his gaze, I saw Griffins flying this way. I could sense Ms Francesa take a gulp.

"Now then, it's time for work Ms Francesca."

“Yes.”

When I said that in a small voice, she replied in a low voice as well.

Seeing her gaze was nailed on the griffins, without making her jump from surprise, I poked at her defenceless shoulder.

“No need to be so nervous. You have comrades so don’t worry about messing up. In fact, just think that it’d be fine even if you mess up a bit.”

“.....Sure.”

[For once, you’re being pretty gentle.]

It’s not that rare right? I shrugged skilfully while still on the branch.

After a short pause, I turned back towards the griffins. Were they cautious of their surroundings, the griffins didn’t land easily.

If it was Aya, she could strike them down from such distance but not Ms Francesca. Of course, neither can I.

First, we need to have them land on the ground and take the bait. We must endure till then.

I wonder how much time had passed. A few minutes or more than that? Or maybe less?



Finally, the Griffins grew less wary and flapped their wings to come down to the ground. Covered in dark brown hair, their wings were of the same colour. Its head was white and beak golden. Its body was a bit more than 3m big and if their wingspan was to be included, it'd be close to 6m.

Even with such a big body, there was no sound as it walked on the ground. That was no because it was just that light stepped but due to the Sylph's protection, so that they could approach its prey silently.

"So big....."

Ms Francesa muttered in a very low voice.

"This is the average size. Once they grow up a bit more, they grow almost twice as big."

"That big!"

While sensing her gasp, I slowly withdrew the mithril sword from my sheath.

[Not using me?]

"I doubt more that more than one or two restraints have been released anyway. This is easier to use."

[muu]

No matter how strong the enemy, the conditions for the release of my constraints is set. When it's not a descendant of the demon god and not strong enough to be considered very dangerous, I could tell how many constraints will be released.

If 3 or 4 get released, I will use Ermenhilde but if not, the Mithril sword was more convenient. It's sharpness wasn't inferior to Ermenhilde either and there was no danger even if it broke. But it'd be a big problem if something happened to Ermenhilde. Or rather, in such a situation I don't want to force Ermenhilde unreasonably.

"Look closely Ms Francesca."

The griffin walked closed to the goblin corpse and reached for it with its beak. Choosing that moment,

"It's heart is right beside the base of the wing, at the centre of its back."

Saying that, I jumped from the branch. The distance down till the griffin was about 3m. holding the sword in both hands, I put all of my weight into it and pierced through the griffin's back.

It gave out a long cry but I definitely felt that the blow was fatal.

It tried to fly again but with its heart pierced, it was unable to flap its wings and fell down to the ground.

“.....I was so worried that it might struggle for an instant.”

[pathetic.]

To my muttering, Ermenhilde spoke in a truly sad voice. I can't help it can I? the opponent is multiple times bigger than me. If I got attacked by its claws, it could tear me up easily.

Even with setting such a perfect trap, scary things were still definitely scary.

Thinking that, I climbed back up. Since ms Francesca was in a skirt, I paid attention to not look up as I climbed and sat back down in my previous spot.

“Next will be Ms Francesca's turn.”

“Y-yes!”

[no need to get so worked up. As long as they don't come in multiple numbers together, there's no need to be that on guard.]

“Demonic beasts are usually stronger but in turn, they aren't very good at using their heads.”

In the end, they're still animals. Since they move on their instincts they have sharp senses but they can't win against their own hunger. Even while knowing it might be a trap, they end up heading towards the food in front of them.

As said by Ermenhilde, if they really don't come in multiple numbers, this trap could be used multiple times. Well, this kind of trap only works on Griffins and similar beasts though.

I glanced towards Aya and Mururu just to see them sigh in relief as their shoulders were drooped.

[Then, while wishing the next one will come alone as well, let's wait again.]

".....Oi, you idiot. Why did you make such a flag raising comment."

[What's that supposed to mean?]

While we talked like that, the sound of flapping of wings came to me again.

Looking towards it, two griffins were heading towards us. Feirona with his bow ready and arrow nocked, looked towards me.

He was asking me what to do now that there were two coming. I gave a signal with my hand for him to standby and thought of what to do.

Well, if I just needed to subjugate them quickly, the best would be to ask Aya but if Ms Francesca is to travel along with us, I want her to get as much experience as possible. But still, two at the same time might be too dangerous for her.

I thought of various things inside my head.

“Now then, let’s work hard shall we?”(renji)

“Eh?”

“I’ll be the decoy so Ms Francesca do something to stop their movements somehow.”

“Somehow?.....is it?”

“Yes. somehow.”

Saying that, without hesitation, I jumped to the ground. The smell of goblin blood can’t be removed that easily. Then it’s the easiest for me to get their attention.

After that, let’s trust in Aya and Francesca who won’t be noticed.

It has always been this way. Aya who knows that, I wonder how she sees my actions.

I think she might be at her wit’s end as well.

As my feet landed to the ground, I drew my mithril sword and held it in my right hand.

[By the way, what’s a ‘flag’?]

“When something happens which is completely opposite to what you just say, basically.”

[What kind of magic is that?]

“It’s just a type of omen.”

Well, maybe it’s slightly different than that?

I had enough composure to think of such things. Feeling surprised at that, I realized I was smiling.

Now then.

“Come at me you shitty birds. I’ve got no grudge against you but I’m gonna kill all of you anyway.”(renji)

While glaring at the griffins in the air, without fear or hesitation, I said that.

## Chapter 72: King of Griffins ②

While being looked down at from up high in the sky, I gripped the Mithril sword in my right hand more tightly.

How should I pull them down to the ground?

While I was thinking that, before I could come up with some strange plan, one of the Griffins came down to the ground fluttering its wings. It looked very heroic as it stood there.

I have seen the Dragon King Fafnir up close. A dragon, that is considered one of the strongest life forms in this world. Yet, while seeing this Griffin which was much smaller than that dragon, was it because I am a man that I still felt awed and found the griffin to be looking really cool?

As it landed on the ground with a heavy sound, it calmly stared towards me.

“— —Wha.”

[Hmph. Looks like you're being looked down on Renji.]

From its gaze I didn't even feel any sort of animosity or hatred for having killed its comrade. It just acknowledged my presence, as a fodder, as its prey, I stood here.

It didn't even consider me as a threat let alone a worthy enemy or foe. It came down to kill this living fodder. That's what its gaze seemed to imply to me.

Not that I can actually read its thought but that's what it felt like. But Ermenhilde seemed to have sensed that as well because in her voice, I could clearly sense a slight irritation and definite anger. Seeing such a reaction from my partner, it instead made me more calm.

"now then,"

The other one was still in the sky. Does it intend to remain there? Or will it support it from the skies? In either case, what I have to do is already decided.

It's gaze was still fixed at me and had not yet noticed Ms Francesca and the others. Then, I'll have it struggle around as much as I can. So that my comrades can move and act easily.

"I'm gonna start, Ermenhilde."

[yeah, go for it.]

In a straight line, I headed towards the Griffin. As soon as I was in range, I swung down the mithril sword on it. Griffin didn't move at all. It continued to look down at me and the attack coming towards its defenceless body——but just before the sword could reach it, it jumped its huge body back in an unbelievable speed and movement to dodge it.

Before my sword, having lost its target, could hit the ground, I took another step forward and swung the sword back up towards it. This time, the attack



reached it slightly and its hair flew in the air.

Under the blue sky, its light brown hair fluttered. Without looking at that for even a second, I stabbed my sword with great momentum towards the place where the hair were falling.

But before that attack could reach, the griffin turned away even faster to avoid that attack aimed at its vitals.....the next thing I knew, I flew in the air. An impact came from the right. Without understanding why, I flew in the air, and the next instant I fell to the ground.

While rolling down on the ground, I confirmed what had blown me away. It was its wings. Unfurling its giant wings, and with the momentum of turning its body, it had knocked me flying.

I had been blown away from just that.....as usual, a demonic beast's power, its physical ability, is truly monstrous. Well, I guess it is an actual monster after all. Rolling away like that and creating some distance from it, I stood back up as soon as the momentum of my rolling died.

[It's coming!]

The instant I heard Ermenhilde, I jumped to the side. The next moment, the ground I was standing on before was torn apart. After a slight delay, the wind blew my mantle strongly.

A blade of wind. You could call it a kamaitachi as well, a sharp invisible blade of wind. With a glance I confirmed where Aya, Mururu, Ms Francesca and Feirona were. For the time being, let's make sure not to unknowingly drag them

into this as well. Well, Feirona and ms Francesca are on top of trees and Mururu has Aya beside her. If its Aya, she should be able to defend against such an attack easily.

Drawing one of the daggers from my waist, I threw it at it. Even without concentration, I could hit such a big target easily.

But even though it headed towards the griffin, midway it made an impossible movement and missed. The [Arrow deflecting Ward]. A barrier of wind that could easily avert such light thrown weapons. Witnessing that barrier once more, even though I knew about it, I ended up clicking my tongue. Seriously, what a troublesome barrier.

“return!”

I was surprised the first time I saw it but after knowing how to fight and deal with it, it's not surprising anymore. The deflected dagger reacted to my voice and this time attacked the griffin from behind. At the same time, I charged towards the griffin from front.

It must have come to the conclusion that the barrier would take care of the dagger as it aimed directly at me. As it raised its right foreleg to attack me, I made a horizontal slash to face it. The mithril sword clashed with its claws as sparks flew. But the impact that came with it shocked me. My right arm went numb and unable to kill the momentum, I ended up retreating backwards. Clicking my tongue at the usual physical strength it possessed, with my left arm I grabbed the dagger that flew towards me which had been unable to penetrate the barrier as expected. Jumping backwards and creating some distance between us, I took a stance with the mithril sword in my right hand and the dagger in my left. It was an impromptu two sword stance but, seriously, what should I do next?

If I could use magic, there were many things I could do but there's a limit with just a sword. Now I have felt this countless times before as well but that doesn't change the fact that my options are limited. I possess no magic and my cheat was weak. For me, fighting such a monster head on and wounding it was really difficult.

[What are you going to do now?]

"What should I do indeed."

At the same time, a blade of wind was released as it headed towards me while gouging the earth. I can't see it directly but since I could see its path as it gouged the earth, I could dodge it without much difficulty.

Jumping out of the range of the wind blade, I once more rushed towards the Griffin and pointed my blade at it. Did it finally start getting irritated of me being a hindrance, the griffin's attacks started becoming more fierce. But that also meant that every attack became cruder as well.

Forelimbs, beak, wings, wind spirit magic. I averted, received and dodged all of those.

This is troublesome. Without disrupting my concentration, I sighed within my mind. As expected, when it's not a surprise attack, it's difficult to take it down instantly. I realized that my breath was becoming rougher as well.

While I was in such thoughts, a sudden impact blew me away. Rolling on the ground again, I quickly looked towards the sky. The one griffin that had

remained in the sky was looking down towards me. It must have been its magic that blew me away. Did I hit my head as I fell? I shook my paining head as I stood up.

“Where’s ms Francesca?”

[Still atop the tree.]

Then, it’s fine. It’s about time I have her do some work as well.

After the last attack, both of the griffin’s awareness was concentrated on me, or rather, they’re currently seeing only me and nothing else right now. I went through quite a bit of pain but finally I have both of their attention. While gazing at the two griffins simultaneously, I moved towards the mountain of goblin corpses.

Like this, at least one of them can be taken down with an ambush attack I think. Well, it is her first time facing a griffin and I am a tad bit worried whether her short sword would reach the griffin’s heart though. But from what I saw in the battle against those goblins, she can use magic to create a blade of ice or rock as well so she should be able to handle that.

I am a bit uneasy but if I keep thinking that way, we won’t be able to do anything. Breathing out, I resolved myself. Let us have some faith in her.

“Ermenhilde. Tell Aya and others to take down the one in the sky as soon as Ms Francesca takes action.”

[Got it.]

Really, at such times her [voice] is so convenient. I doubt griffins can understand human language but they would get curious of who else was here if I shouted something out.

While being cautious of the griffins, I retreated and reached the corpse mountain at exactly the same time when Ermenhilde finished her explanation to others. Taking a deep breath, I smelled so much blood that I almost felt like vomiting. I took a deep breath to calm myself but instead it made me more sick. Sighing, I loosened up my body that had started growing stiff from tension.

“Well then, let’s do this.”

[Yeah. The hunt has just begun, let’s hurry this up.]

Hearing her, I pointed my sword towards the griffin that seemed like it had begun to drool.

“Come and eat me if you think you can. Don’t cry when you wreck your stomach later though.”

When that happens, I’ll stab you to death from the inside.

Muttering that in low voice, I ran. And predicting as I felt a slight wind behind me, I slid on the ground to dodge the wind blade. I felt the strong wind pass by and saw the tree behind me get a deep cut on it. Without hesitating from that attack, I jumped in towards its bosom and slashed with my sword. At the same time, I used my dagger to stop the swing from its right forelimb made to drive me away.

Even if my own power wasn't enough to pierce its skin, all I have to do is use its own power against it. The dagger stabbed into its leg and I felt a wet and warm sensation on my left arm. The next instant, I was blown away from the violent and brutish swing of its limb. Again? Such a thought came to me for a second. Blown away like a pebble, for the Nth time today, I rolled on the ground. And I ended up right underneath the tree in which Ms Francesca was hiding.

Seeing it all go as planned, even though in pain, I ended up smiling. While acting like I was dead laying flat on the ground, I gave a glance upwards in the tree to see Ms Francesca look at me worriedly. Also, since she was in a skirt I think I saw something totally unfitting that of a battlefield but let's ignore that.

"Ah, that hurt."

[Obviously. Even when knowing it'd hurt that much, it's amazing how you still can decide to act as bait anyway.]

"used to it. I'm just used to it. Humans can really do anything once they get used to it."

[yet I feel that avoiding painful things is what makes one human though.]

I guess that's true as well.

Encouraging my own hurting body, I stood back up. Well, my consciousness is still fine and the pain isn't that bad. Only some light hits and lacerations. I don't think I have broken any bone either. Like that, I moved a bit. I moved just

enough to make sure that when the griffin moves it'll come directly below ms Francesca.

And maybe thinking that my movement was me trying to get away, it rushed towards me. Probably thinking of ramming me or clawing me down. To face it, I lowered my waist and gripped my weapon tightly and—

“Ms Francesca!!”(renji)

“Yes!”

With a loud woman's shout, just like me before, she jumped down from the branch with her short sword. There was no way that griffin could react in time and she landed on its back and stabbed the short sword into its back. The next moment, the griffin rampaged from the pain. Raising its front limbs like a horse it struggled and tried to throw ms Francesca off itself. Judging from that I can tell that her sword did not reach the heart after all.

Ms Francesca on its back screamed.

“Don't move——”

I gripped my mithril sword tightly and holding it like an arrow knocked on a bow——

“——Yoh!!”

This time, without any interruption, I stabbed straight into what should be its

heart. The sword went deep into its body and the griffin stopped moving.

The next instant, I felt another presence behind the griffin's body. It was the other griffin that had landed on the ground. Seeing it, I lightly tapped my pocket.

"Now."

[Aya, do it.]

Immediately, multiple grassroots grabbed the hind legs of the griffin stopping its movement. Each and every one of those grass was as thick as my finger and were strong enough to not break even as the griffin struggled violently to break free from this sudden trap. And as it tried to struggle and fly away and the grass seemed like it'd bend and break, it was suddenly blown away to the side. With a loud noise, it crashed into the trees and after taking down a few trees with it, it was released. No matter how strong body the griffin might possess, there's no way it could endure something like that. After getting released from the grass, its wings were broken and its beautiful fur was stained with blood. It was a cruel sight.

But still, it had not died and was trying to stand back up. Its stamina amazed me but—before it could stand up, Feirona jumped down from his tree and skewered its head.

As usual, he's nimble. Since I could never move as nimbly as he does, I could only honestly admire him. If I tried that, I would have probably fallen down head first. Thinking that, I withdrew my mithril sword from the griffin's body. As I wiped the blood of it with my mantle, Ms francesca climbed down its back and ran towards me.



“Are you hurt somewhere!?”(fran)

“Hm? Ah, this much is usual.”

[.....though I don't consider getting used to pain a bad thing, the way you said it doesn't sound right.]

Did I say something weird?

While I was thinking that, Aya, Mururu and Feirona who took down the other one with ease also came towards us. Well, Mururu didn't do much this time though.

“You did pretty well.”(renji)

“I was really surprised when you suddenly jumped right in front of the griffin.”(elf)

“Sorry sorry. Well, it's great that you understood what my intention was though.”

When I said that to Feirona, he gave a deep sigh. If it was Aya or Feirona who had gone out instead of me, that griffin would have died before it could be led towards Ms Francesca. Saying thanks for understanding without me having to say it out loud, I turned towards Ms Francesca.

“Oh, right.”(renji)

“Yes?”(fran)

“open your right hand.”

I showed my own open palm to her as example. Unable to understand what I meant, she still imitated me and showed her palm. When, I lightly smacked my own palm against her. Basically a high five.

“Wha?”

Ms Francesca spoke up confused. Finding her reaction amusing, I laughed. Seeing me like that, then looking at her own palm next, she looked back towards me. Seeing us like that, Aya giggled while hiding her mouth.

“Eh, umm?”(fran)

“When things go well and as planned.....how should I say this? It’s kind of a ritual?”(renji)

“I don’t think its as formal as you’re making it sound though.”(aya)

Since I couldn’t think of better of a word for it, it ended up becoming a question instead. And Aya gave a tsukkomi at that.

Among us, we do it quite a lot. When things go well, when we end up safe like this without losing anyone, that is.”(Aya)

Saying that, she raised her palm towards me as well. When I high-fived with her as well, her smile deepened. But the next moment, her eyes narrowed again.

“But, Renji-san, you were being reckless as usual I think.”(aya)

[Seriously. He doesn't listen when I tell him that so scold him more for me as well Aya.]

“What? I wasn't forcing myself at all.”(renji)

“It may not seem as forcing yourself to you Renji-san but that doesn't change the fact that it was reckless.”(aya)

‘Especially when I'm here as well’ I'll just act as I didn't hear that last part. Even if I could just rely on her, it just seems too uncool to me.

While I was talking to Aya, I heard another *clap* sound. Looking that way, Mururu and Ms Francesca did a high five as well. Both were smiling making me feel pleasant as well.

“Ah, but.”

But soon, Ms Francesca's expression clouded again.

“What's wrong?”

Wondering what happened, I spoke up as she turned towards me along with Mururu.

“No, it’s just that in the end, I couldn’t kill the griffin so…….”(fran)

“Aah.”

That, eh?

Well, it’d be impossible with that sword. I was thinking that she might create a weapon out of her magic to attack but that wasn’t bad either. She did accomplish her job after all.

“You shouldn’t worry about that too much. Since at least you were able to take action properly.”(renji)

“……Is that so?”(fran)

[yeah, I think so as well.]

“Yes, you were able to jump down from the tree perfectly as well.”(aya)

“See?”(renji)

Feeling relieved, she sighed with her hand on her chest. I can’t have her fight being worried about each and everything either after all.

Only two griffins remain. And including that Arch Griffin, only three remain.

“Though I joke around a lot, I don’t like lying.”(renji)

“Then you should have just praised her honestly.”(aya)

“But I’m bad with serious stuff like that too.”

“Fuh, well that’s true as well.”(elf)

Aya spoke in a fed up voice as Feirona agreed to my comment. Is that much fun to tease me eh? As my glass heart was getting wounded, Mururu pulled at my mantle.

“Did Fran do well?”(mururu)

“Yes, she did.”(renji)

When I honestly answered to Mururu’s question, Ms Francesca held her hands together in front of her chest in relief. Looks like she’s happy now. But because seeing such a reaction is embarrassing is why I didn’t speak this directly before though.

I really have a troublesome personality if I say so myself.

Mururu seemed satisfied as well as she muttered 'I see' with a smile.

[You really need to learn being more honest Renji.]

"But wouldn't such a me be too off putting?"

[I don't think so?]

".....You are a tad too honest you know?"

I sighed at my partner reacting so honestly to my joke. Seeing us, Aya giggled. Mururu and Ms Francesca as well.

Even though we're still in the middle of the job, these guys sure are carefree.

"Here."

".....With me as well?"(elf)

And finally, I pointed my palm towards Feirona. He must not have expected it as he spoke that curtly. Since he's normally acting all cool and calm, something like this might be embarrassing to him.

His reaction was so amusing that it showed on my expression as Feirona just narrowed his eyes.

"There are still a few griffins left. Let's hurry up and take care of them as

well.”

“Sure.....”

Did he resign himself to it as Feirona finally raised his right hand as well.

And the sound of a high five resounded in the air.

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.

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The bare mountain near Merdiore wasn't some sharp cliff but actually even had a proper paved path leading to the very top of the mountain. If I had to compare, it was similar to Mt Fuji of Japan. Though it is definitely not as tall. But as compared to the scenery around it, the mountain didn't have even a speck of greenery on it. Years ago, it was supposedly very lush green or so I'm told but due to the effect of the Demon God's descendant that had been once living on this mountain, all greenery had slowly died away. By the time we had been summoned to this world, it had already become a bare mountain but from what I've heard from the people who had seen the green mountain before, it was apparently a very beautiful place to see.

Everytime I recall this, I think how much I wanted to see it that way. In this world where science and machines didn't exist, the nature was pure and air was clean. It's a beautiful world. And even in such a beautiful world, a place that the inhabitants called beautiful, I always wondered how pretty that place would be.

I'm sure I'm not the only one who has this thought either.

While walking through the gravel path, so as to fix my slightly ragged breath, I slightly turned my neck around.

“fuu..”

Now then, I wonder how tall this mountain truly is. Unfortunately, there were no accurate markings either so I couldn't tell but I think we have climbed at least a third of its height now.

Originally, there was no plan to be climbing mountains. The plan was to use goblin corpses as bait to lure out the griffins and ambush them to kill them all. It was the safest and the easiest way to complete the subjugation in my opinion and if possible, I wanted to take out the remaining griffins and the Arch Griffin like that as well. But looks like it won't go that easily.

After that, we were able to take down one more griffin but the remaining didn't show up at all even after waiting for a long while. I had asked Dagram and minimised public travelling on the highway, but that was only till noon. And currently looking at the sky, in the cloudy sky, the gloomy sun was almost reaching its highest. Meaning, we didn't have much time left.

Though I know rushing things won't get us a good result but if we cross over the time limit, there really might be casualties.

So, though slightly dangerous, we decided to head towards the griffins' nest ourselves. Even if Griffins were bird-type demonic beast, with their huge size, they won't be able to make a nest on some small cliff or some weak tree top. If



they did, they'll be the ones to wall due to their own weight.

So they make their nests in wide flat open areas, where they could see any enemy approach from afar. Having already looked up the map of this mountain beforehand, it was all in my head right now.

"Renji, we there yet?"

"A little more to go. What, getting tired?"(renji)

"uun."

When I asked that back, Mururu shook her head. She probably asked that not because she was tired but because Ms Francesca was clearly looking more and more fatigued.

I glanced towards her who was walking slightly behind us. Aya was walking beside her as well. Though far, I could hear her ragged breath here as well. Looks like its her first time climbing a mountain so her stamina was running out faster than usual.

"What's wrong?"(elf)

I stopped for a while and waited for her when Feirona came back. He didn't seem tired in the slightest as he climbed down from a few rocks with light steps.

"Got tired, so we took a break."

“.....I see.”

His gaze turned towards Ms Francesca instead of me. Looks like he understood who I meant when I said ‘tired’, so he didn’t say anything further.

“So, how was it?”(renji)

“Yeah. Like you had said, in an open spot slightly away from here, the griffin’s nest is there.”(elf)

“Then, we’ll be done once we kill those as well?”(mururu)

“Yeah. Let’s finish it up quickly and go back to our inn to sleep.”(renji)

“I’m hungry as well.”(mururu)

“.....You two, really don’t change do you?”(elf)

[Haah, could you be more focused.....How deplorable.]

Both Feirona and Ermenhilde spoke up in astonished voices at the same time.

While we were talking like that, finally Ms Francesca caught up to us as well. Her breathing was rough and heavy. And her hair was sticking to her forehead from sweat.

“You okay?”

“Ye, yes. I’m still...fine..”(fran)

As she gave a forced smile, I looked towards Aya who was walking with her supporting her.

She just gave a wry smile and shook her head. Looks like she won’t listen even if I told her to wait at the foot of the hill it seems.

“Well, let’s move ahead then.”(renji)

“Yeah. I found a place where we can see the enst without getting noticed as well, I’ll lead you there.”(elf)

“I leave it to you.”

I’m sure he’s also showing his concern by finding a place where she could rest while we can confirm the griffins nest at the same time. Seriously, this guy really knows how to take care of everyone. Once again, I looked up to the sky. The clouds were getting thicker and though the weather shouldn’t go bad out of nowhere, we still don’t have much time left. Well, if it rains, it actually would be advantageous to us since we’re fighting griffins.

“Is something the matter?”

Since I just stood there in a daze, Aya spoke up to me.

“Nothing. Looks like the weather could worsen anytime now.”(renji)

“So it seems. It’d make things easier if it rained though.”

Rain— —or rather, when the world is filled with water droplets, it was a situation fatal if trying to manifest Wind spirit Sylph’s spirit magic. The wind blade, and the wind barrier, both are very difficult to see from the naked eyes. But when its raining, you can see that invisible wind as well.

Just the difference of seeing and not seeing an attack makes a huge difference and would lessen the burden on us during battle. But.....

“Ms Francesca, keep working hard for a bit more okay?”

“Ye-s.”

If it rains means that our bodies will get colder as well and you’d drain stamina faster.

And not just Ms Francesca, even Mururu and Feirona, though they weren’t showing it, they are pretty tired as well. Of course, it was the same for me and Aya as well. Fuumu, while putting my finger to my chin, I began walking.

Though fighting against an Arch Griffin is great experience, I don’t want her to overexert herself either. If things look like they’re going bad, It’ll be better to just ask on Aya to end it. The first attack will be a lightning strike. Literally. And that would end it.

While I was in such thought, we reached the place Feirona found where we

could stay unnoticed while checking the griffins' nest.

"Let's rest up a bit."(renji)

"Eh, but....."(fran)

"It'll be noon soon. Here, drink some water and fix your breathing."

Handing over the water bag on my waist to her, I put down two other bags on the ground. They contained some provisions, potions and medicinal herbs. Since I didn't bring it in bulk, I divided the crackers and the dried meat between Feirona and Mururu.

Knowing that it wasn't tasty, Mururu frowned but I can't help that. If we even tried cooking something, the griffins would instantly smell it after all. Splitting some food with Aya as well, we tried to confirm the positions of the griffins.

2 remained. One was the same as the ones we had killed till now, with brown fur.

And the other one, was almost twice as bigger than the one by its side and its fur wasn't brown but black. And though we're pretty far—

"It's a female, eh?"(renji)

"So it seems."

Underneath her black furred body, was a pure white.....egg. The egg alone was bigger than any human and was placed right in the centre of the nest made of grass and branches.

I see. This is why me and Mururu didn't get to see it no matter how many times we scouted out. It was always here at the nest, warming the egg.

That means, the other griffin must be her male partner.

"Seriously, it's pretty depressing."(renji)

Leaking a sigh, I looked up towards the sky. The dark clouds that seemed to have gotten even thicker felt like they were expressing my current feelings.

After killing so many monsters, and even killing many of them without feeling anything just a while ago, I still felt disturbed just by seeing a mother warming its egg.

I could only smile bitterly. How absurd.

Even though I'm about to go kill the mother, how can I hesitate over just an egg now?

"Aya, could you go back to Merdiore with Ms Francesca?"

".....you know I won't."

“I see.”

Her voice seemed slightly angry because I asked such a stupid thing at such a moment.

I guess it was obvious. If she didn't have even that much of a resolve, she won't be travelling would she? The resolve to fight is the same as resolving to live and to kill. Even though I already know that Aya has it, I still asked such a thing.

That's probably because I'm still treating her as a kid.

[Renji.]

“Hm? What is it, Ermenhilde?”

[.....Can you fight?]

Instead, I ended up getting worried for by her.

Giving a wry smile at that, I brought out the medal from my pocket.

“A little too late to ask that, don't you think?”(renji)

I'll fight.

Flipping the medal with my thumb, it twirled in the air with a dry sound. And I

caught it with my right hand.

It was, Heads.

“It’s Heads. I’ll manage somehow.”



## Chapter 73: King of Griffins ③

Thick clouds covered the sky and though it was still noon, the world had become dark like it was evening. The air was humid and the temperature had risen.

The griffin that was in its nest also noticed the change and looked up towards the sky. Was it due to its wild instincts or was it due to the protection of Sylph? Either way, it definitely felt the change.

Confirming its reaction from far away, I gave a quick glance towards Aya who was concentrating nearby. In contrast to the darkening world, her body was glowing with gold magical energy and it felt like the sun was shining only here. That's how dazzling and warm that light was.

Fuyou Aya's magical energy. Second only to the Goddess Astraera's power, she was the [Grand Magus] who could face one on one with even the Demon God himself if it was only a competition of magic.

Beside her, both Ms Francesca and Feirona were looking at her, completely entranced. As users of magic themselves, they must have felt something.

In contrast, Mururu, who was pretty much indifferent to magic was simply thinking about how much she was shining. I think that's not really right either though.

[As usual, her magical energy is incredible.]

“I know.”

Agreeing to Ermenhilde’s voice, I looked towards the sky.

The thickening clouds were slowly gathering around Aya and the grey clouds had mostly turned into dark black ones. The pressure around increased so much that even I who had no magical energy could clearly sense it. And the torrent of magical energy, not wind, made the leaves and plants around sway. The speed of the clouds also grew faster as they swirled right above us.

Suddenly, as if letting the whole world know, with a huge sound that resounded till deep inside my own stomach, thunder roared. The black clouds had transformed into thunder clouds. Seeing flashes inside the black clouds, I could see thin lightning within.

“———”

Looking closely, I could see Aya’s lips moving.

She was chanting the spell to fire the lightning strike magic. To use magic, imagination alone is enough but to make that magic stronger, effective, have more range and to manifest the magic with stability, it was necessary to make that imagination distinct and vivid.

For that purpose, [spells] were used. When used it to obliterate the countless demons that had once filled the skies, and when she used it to pierce through the Dragon King Fafnir’s scales, the lightning that had made even the Demon Lord falter, she had used this spell.

The reason she spoke in such a soft voice that we couldn't hear was not because she's in some deep concentration or anything but simply because she's too embarrassed to shout the incantation out loud that's all. Well, it's not that I don't understand.

It would be a bit too much to have two with us who'd shout out the names of their attacks loudly everytime. In fact, even us fighting together with him felt embarrassed. Shouting out your attack names was pretty useless in real life. True, it raises your spirit and confidence and I do get that it might help you put more strength behind the swing of your sword. But, it also gives away what you're about to do so it was basically the same as giving away your trump card.

.....but even when I explained that, he didn't listen to me saying that it was the spirit that matters more. Seriously how much more effort do they put in it?

[What's wrong?]

"I just recalled something I didn't want to."

[Did something happen?]

"It's something back then."

Next time I see Koutarou, I really should punch him in the face at least once. While thinking that, I caressed the handle of the knife on my waist.

"What incredible magical energy."(fran)

Ms Francesca who came beside me spoke that in a dazed voice. With her left hand she held down her hair that was blowing from the torrent of magical energy while using her right hand to keep her skirt down. If the weather was nice, those black stockings covering her beautiful legs would be a sight to see as well though. Mururu who had her hair tied didn't have any problem but even Feirona was using his hand to keep his hair down. Really, long hair can be a bit troublesome at such times.

"I don't think I can use magic like that."(fran)

"Well, that's because it's Aya who's using it after all."

"Yes."

Even though she spoke that easily, her face showed a frustrated expression. I could easily understand what was going through her mind. I'm not her but...I know what it feels like to see a genius right in front of you who was also younger than you.

Because I was the same.

I was also once envious of Souichi and others. That's why, somehow, I could understand her feelings from just her expression and her tone.

"It's fine. You have things, only you can do as well."(renji)

"Eh?"

“Aya is Aya. You don’t need to become Aya as well, is what I’m saying.”

[What do you mean?]

“.....Why are you the one asking that?”

When I sighed like that, I felt the wind making my mantle flutter become even stronger.

Raising a cute scream, Ms Francesca rolled up. Smiling on seeing her like that, I moved in front of her to protect her from the wind.

“Mururu, don’t get blown away by the wind, okay?”

“I’ll be fine.”

Saying that, she moved along with Feirona and hid behind a nearby rock.

We should do the same. When I thought that, an even louder thunder roared.

“I’m starting.”

Aya declared.

The Arch Griffin was still focused towards the sky and had not noticed us yet.

She can do it.

I was confident of that.

“Ms Francesca, be sure to look carefully.”(renji)

“Wha, Yes!”

“This is the magic that destroyed around a thousand demons in an instant.”

A thunderous roar resounded that could make ones legs feel paralyzed. The instant Ms Francesca gripped on to my mantle, the world was enveloped in light.

A light that really made one think that followed by an explosion that could tear your eardrums. The shockwave went through me and for just a second, I lost all sense of balance. I couldn't even tell whether I was even standing or lying on the ground. I couldn't even keep my eyes open due to the intense light. Using my right hand to cover my eyes, I used my left hand to support Ms Francesca who was desperately clinging to endure the shockwave.

The body-numbing shockwave only lasted for an instant. The bright light also died down and I hit my ears to regain my lost sense of hearing. That alone made me feel incredibly dizzy.

My senses didn't come back instantly but I was able to endure it without falling down. That's how big of a shockwave it was. Let alone taking it directly, it

affected us even though we were standing here so far. This was Aya's magic. Even though this was still far from her full strength, we still took this much damage. If we had been even a bit closer, it would have been actually dangerous for us as well.

"Re-nji.....sama?"(fran)

"I'm here. Looks like you're fine as well."(renji)

My mantle was pulled strongly. Seeing her move trying to look for me like that, I replied while putting more strength in my supporting embrace while holding her.

When, I felt something cold on my cheeks. The moment I realized it was rain, it began to rain fiercely. Because of the lightning strike, I guess it's normal for rain to follow. Before we catch a cold, we should get some shelter--

"Renji-san! It's coming!!"

Aya shouted loud enough to not get drowned down by the storm.

"Ermenhilde!"

Instantly, I forced my still slightly numb limbs to tightly grip the long sword created out of magical energy. At the same time, a wall of rock manifested in front of us. And the next instant, the rock wall creaked violently. Even though it was a wall created by Aya, it was already cracking.

There was only one enemy here who could use such a strong attack.

“Ms Francesca! Go towards Feirona and——”

Before I could complete my sentence, I felt a gaze on me.

Looking on top of the wall of rock, I saw it.

A Griffin three times bigger than normal. I couldn't tell before from far away but——this was much bigger than any I've seen before. It must be really old. Its eyes were staring at me without moving and I'm sure it would come down to attack me if I made even a slight movement. Its throat was shrinking and eyes were wide.

It's angry. I could tell that from experience.

At what?

——at us, who tried to kill it.

[Renji!]

“tch!”

Was I too overwhelmed by the pressure, finally I regained control of my body. Returning to my senses from Ermenhilde's words, I held on to Ms Francesca and jumped backwards. She raised a cute scream that really didn't match the



situation but I ignored it.

The next moment, the griffin came down where we had been standing. The fact that it didn't seem bothered by the rain was probably because of the wind barrier surrounding it. Normally, that barrier would be invisible but due to the rain, I could see it right now. That barrier could even deflect arrows.

Seriously, this thing is way too big. It might even be bigger than a ogre with just its main body alone. As it spread its wings wide to intimidate us, the pressure I felt was similar to what I felt when I first faced the Dragon king Fafnir.

There's no chance I could win.

A mere griffin. It was just one of the many species of demonic beasts. But even so, the griffin in front of me had such a presence.

My eyes met its eyes. I could clearly sense a 'will' in them. Other than anger, there was clear distinct will in its eyes. It was judging us as enemies.

With a eased movement, it turned its eyes to look behind me. Probably towards Aya. Then, it turned to look at Feirona and Mururu.

"Ren—"

[Stay quiet! Do not talk.]

Ermenhilde shut up Ms Francesca who was probably about to speak to me. She didn't want even the slightest of things to stimulate this griffin.

And in the meantime, I thought. How did this griffin survive?

Aya definitely struck at it with lightning. Even if it was a surprise attack, it was a magic that even surprised Fafnir. No matter how old this griffin was, a mere demonic beast should not have been able to survive it.

Yet, it is alive and in front of us. I could only think of two possibilities. Either this griffin has some special resistance towards lightning or through some method, it was able to nullify the lightning.

And there are three things I know right now. First, it survived Aya's magic. Secondly, now that it has come so close, Aya can't use magic on it again. And lastly—

“Mururu! Stay beside Aya and Ms Francesca!!”(renji)

I have no choice but to face it head on now.

Letting go of Ms Francesca on to the ground, I ran towards the Arch Griffin with full speed. It must have been expecting it as it showed no sign of panic.

It's head turned towards me and I could tell it was gathering strength in its limbs to attack. Resolved to face it directly, I put strength in my grip holding the sword as well. Feirona, trying to support me, launched an arrow but as expected, it was deflected by the wind barrier.

It raised its right limb. The timing was perfect. If I were to continued running

like I am, I will get crushed under its foot. In the time I reached it, I desperately thought. It's an enemy that could resist Aya's magic. I am now not even sure that I could hurt it at all. We're going to definitely need Aya's magic to kill it for sure.

I know her full strength. If she were to use her magic at full strength, this whole area will turn into a burnt ground. If that happens, we'll end up as cinders along with it.

"Let's do this, Ermenhilde!"

[What are you planning to do!?!]

I rushed right in front of the griffin, and at the same time, it brought down its leg at me. Abandoning even the thought of taking that attack head on, I focused solely on dodging. I concentrated. And thought.

I focused on each and every movement of the griffin; so much that my head hurt, and came to the conclusion that I couldn't dodge it. Even if I can see the attack, my body won't move in time. Or rather, my reactions are still dull due to the shockwave from the lightning earlier. I swung my blade like baseball bat and slashed at its right leg.

Holding the sword with both hands, I used my full strength yet my hands went completely numb and the divine sword was blown away.

Still, I was able to avert that attack—but, with incredible reaction speed, it used its left leg to strike from the other side, outside of my view. Feeling an impact that made me wonder if my right arm had been broken, and unable to

endure, I was about to be blown away but I used my dragon bone knife to stab at the ground and create some distance between us. It's a situation where my body moved faster than I could think this time. Looking at its left leg, I could see torn grassroots entwined around it. Aya must have used them to obstruct its attack but it must have torn itself free by force. And yet, it still held so much power. If I had taken a direct hit, what would have happened to me?

Quickly standing up, and ignoring the feeling of dizziness and nausea that I got from just one attack, I leaped on the griffin. Something hot, not pain, ran through my right upper arm but I ignored it for now. If I did start worrying about it, I won't be able to concentrate further.

I didn't have the time to care about myself. Grabbing the thicker than expected fur on its body, I held on tightly so as to not fall down. I didn't even have the time to put my knife back into its sheath so I held it between my teeth. As I pulled my head closer towards its fur, I could smell the distinct beastly smell.

[Cover us!]

Since I had the knife in my mouth, Ermenhilde gave the directions in my place.

At the same time, the Griffin rampaged to shake me off. But it only tried to get rid of me by unfolding its wings and kicking the ground just once. Instantly, it used its experience and instincts of having lived several years to switch to using magic to blow me off.

As I prepared myself for the impact, at the same time the griffin also stopped its struggle. In that moment, I used all of my strength, as if trying to rip off its fur, to pull myself on top of its back. It was then I finally realized that the

griffin's limbs had been trapped by grass roots. It must have been Aya and Ms Francesca but it quickly ripped them off with brute strength.

[So, what are you going to do?]

What should I do? It's great that I was able to climb on top of it as if I was riding it but really, what should I do next? I did all this in the naïve hope that its attacks won't reach me here but it also made me realize that I had no way to kill it decisively either.

I put the knife I had within my teeth back in its sheath and drew my mithril sword. And used all my strength to stab it into the griffin's back. According to my experience, if I stabbed it all the way through, it should pierce the heart but —before all that, my sword was unable to even pierce its flesh.

It felt like stabbing at something made of hard rubber. My strength wasn't enough to pierce through its stiff skin. Seriously, I felt like crying at my own powerlessness.

In the meantime, the griffin, finally free of its constraints, began to move. It felt similar to when I am riding a horse somewhat; so weird. It must have come to the conclusion that I was unable to do anything even while riding its back as it looked towards Feirona who had been shooting arrows at it for a while.

It moved with ease, probably because it thinks that we have no way to fight against it anymore.

“Renji! Do you think you can do something about it already!?” (elf)

“You sure make it sound like its easy!!”(renji)

While shooting arrows constantly as if to keep the griffin back, Feirona spoke that.

Seriously. As a man, it sure is pathetic to not have any sort of finishing move, really. Muttering to myself. I looked down towards the griffin who continued to move even with me on its back.

“Don’t underestimate me, you shitty bird!”(renji)

Throwing away the mithril sword, I drew the dragon knife and held in my left hand. In my right, I manifested a knife made of Ermenhilde’s magical energy. The blade was silver as usual, with a jade coloured line running down it. The covenants released were just two.

Confirming that, I used all my strength to stab its back with the 2 knives in my other hand.

Instantly, the griffin, as if neighing, twisted its back.

If I lack strength, then I’ll depend on pure sharpness instead. The two sharp knives pierced through its tough skin. But there wasn’t much blood loss. It must be that since I lacked strength, the knives didn’t go in very deep.

It struggled about trying to make me fall again but I was able to hold on due

to the help of the knives stabbing into its back. Ignoring the restraints and arrows of Aya and Feirona respectively, it ran around trying to make me fall. As a result, not just me but even Aya and others were left free to act but it must have felt that they won't be able to do anything much anyway. And suddenly, it spread its wings.

“Tch!”

Realizing what it was about to do, I balanced myself on its back by lying flat on it and put strength in the arms holding on to the knife. My right arm pained dully but I grit my teeth and endured it.

The next moment, feeling a floating sensation, I closed my eyes for just a few seconds.

And when I opened my eyes again, as expected——the ground was far down below. I was in the air.

“Alright. For the time being, it's all according to plan.”(renji)

[.....It is?]

Ermenhilde spoke sounding suspicious.

Well, if I was in her place, I'd ask the same. But I did intend to somehow make this griffin take flight, though I didn't mean to fly together with it.

“In the sky, Aya can use her magic without holding back after all.”

[I see.]

Did she really not realize that? While tightening my grip on the knives, I let out a sigh.

Somehow, we've come this far. We should be fine.

[So? How do you plan on getting back down?]

"How, indeed."

[Try to not die in such a ridiculous manner, will you?]

"Don't call it ridiculous. I'm really desperate here, you know?"

[I know but.....I'd be happy if you'd start treating yourself more seriously as well.]

"Even though you're the one who is always asking me to act like a hero?"

[That's true but this is a bit different.]

She spoke in a fed up voice.

Yeah. I'll say this again but I would say the same if I were in her place.



I did consider just jumping down but there's no one here who could easily catch me right now. Aya's smart so she should have already guessed my aim and should be already preparing her magic. I should ask Feirona and Ms Francesca to ready a magic that could catch me safely.

I'll only get one chance at this but there's no other choice either.

I really have only bad memories of flying. I have experience of flying along with Anastasia but I recalled that I almost fell down even then. What a bad thing to remember.

Why do such bad memories always remain in the depths of your mind? And another bad memory will be added today as well. The moment I thought that, the griffin turned upside down trying to make me fall. Considering it has the physique like that of a bird, I didn't expect it to be able to do such an action so I was surprised making me late in properly grabbing on to its back. Combined with the increasing pain in my right arm, I had to hold on with just one arm.

My body almost stiffened from the fear of getting thrown in the air as I desperately put strength in my left arm. It must be able to fly upside down due to the power of the Sylph wind spirit but as a bird—as an animal with wings, it shouldn't be able to fly like this for very long.

And I was indeed correct as it quickly turned its body back up normally. I hurried to get back on its back and this time, without any hesitation or shame, tightly hugged on to its back with all my strength.

[.....You, you okay?]

“Do I look fucking okay to you!?”

While feeling fear that made not just my heart beat faster but actually make me break into cold sweat, I quickly fixed my breathing back to normal.

Most probably, on more time.....no it'll keep on doing this till I fall off.— —-I felt like crying just thinking that.

“I am definitely never ever going to fly again!”

[I feel like you said something similar in the past as well though.]

Oh shut up.

[But still, in this situation, there's not much you can do.....]

“Let me— —”

—Think. Before I could even finish my sentence, the griffin inverted again. This time since I was ready, I didn't panic but as expected, there was a limit to my leg strength and my lower half flew in the air again.

And looking the other way, I saw another griffin heading towards us.

“— —-!?!?”

I couldn't speak.

The shock from seeing that one alive made me only think bad of what was ahead of us.

I immediately let go of the knives. Instantly, I was hit by a floating sensation that made my body go stiff and my throat cramped unable to even scream.

“Ermenhilde!!”

Forcing down my fear, I manifested the god slaying weapon in my left hand. It was in the form of a long bending weapon—a whip.

I cracked the whip and made it grab the leg of the other griffin that had appeared. Though I had avoided falling down to my death, I still had no way of going back to the ground. On top of that, since I had come out of the arch griffins wind barrier, I was instantly soaked by the rain. Though it cooled down my body, it also made body stiffer.

Marking me, who was hanging in the air, as an easy target, the arch griffin rotated.

It's coming.

I don't even have the time to resolve myself properly but I don't plan on giving up either. Making my body sway as I prepared to dodge it, my whole vision suddenly turned white.

It was due to the flash of lightning. Since I had moved away from the arch griffin, there was no reason for Aya to hesitate anymore. The surprise lightning painted the world with white light.

“Shit.”

Cursing, and blinded, I began climbing up towards the griffin I was hanging on to with my whip.

But I was blinded for only a second, and I soon saw it.

The wind barrier that should be able to avoid arrows at most had deflected the lightning strike as well. I'm not knowledgeable enough to tell whether this was scientifically possible or not but, it was a fact that the griffin had indeed deflected even that strong lightning strike magic. And I doubt that a griffin would be knowledgeable about the theories and principles behind lightning so it means that it deflected it based on pure instinct.

And soon enough, the griffin passed through the place I was hanging before. I confirmed that with my still not fully recovered eyesight. It should be the same for it as well. Even if it did avert the lightning, it should still be blinded by the light.

I think back when it found us the first time as well, it didn't instantly attack us because it was still temporarily blinded.

But even after knowing that, it was of no help to me right now.

I hope that after failing two times, Aya has realized that lightning won't work

on this arch griffin.

“Ermenhilde, can your voice reach Aya?”

[Sorry, she’s too far.]

It can’t be helped then. I’ll have to trust her and focus on my own survival.

I don’t intend on dying here. I’ll live and return back to the ground.....i felt like crying for being the only having to face such a harsh reality.

Climbing to the top of my whip, I grabbed the griffin’s legs. But the griffin didn’t like that and began to struggle trying to throw me off.

“Tch!”

Clicking my tongue, I dissipated the whip into jade green magical energy. In its stead, I unsheathed the dagger on my waist and stabbed it into the griffin’s legs to hang by it.

Somehow, I have suppressed my fear of falling.....well, not really but at least this should help me in avoiding suddenly falling down. And the arch griffin, having recovered its eyesight already, headed towards the defenceless me.

And this time, I could see multiple transparent spheres around it which were deflecting the rain. Wind bullets. Normally they’d be invisible but the rain allowed me to see them.

——that said, given my current situation, I can't really dodge them properly.

[It's coming!]

"I know!!"

Yelling back to Ermenhilde, I thought of what to do. I thought and thought but ——really, there's nothing I can do in this situation.

I looked down—towards the ground. Right below me, though not very dense, was a thicket. It's only moderately tall but I am not in the position to be choosy. If I stay like this, I'd get shot down by the wind bullets.

If I have to fall, it'd be better to fall by my own decision. Since it was winter, the fact that there weren't many leaves on the trees made me very nervous but I really didn't have a choice.

[Renji!]

"———"

The moment I took a deep breath, Ermenhilde's voice came at the same time. With a half-assed resolve, I threw myself in the air. The heavy rain pelted my body. Yet the cold rain felt pleasant to my body probably because staying near death for so long had my body hotter. It cleared my thoughts.

The 2 griffins chased after the falling me.

So fast. They looked like two meteors. Not that I have ever seen a meteor fall.

“Come at me——”

Jade green coloured magical energy gathered in my left hand and formed into a bow. A jade green bow with golden decorations. Opposite to its look, it was a simple construct. Gripping this bow that focused more on practicality, I pulled the string with my right hand.

A jade green arrow formed automatically. While falling down, I aimed. My back could feel the ground getting closer and closer but I didn't get impatient. The worst thing I could do right now would be to panic and miss.

It'll be fine.

[Renji.]

“Yeah.”

Her voice, was calm. Was it due to her trust in me or was it because she didn't think I'd die here?

It'll be fine.

I can do this.

.....if it's us, we can do this.

Like hell I'd die here.

I promised. That I'd live, return, and play chess with her.

I'll protect my promise. This time, definitely.....i'll keep my promise.

——Lend me your strength, Ermenhilde——Eru.

Aiming at the arch griffin, I fired the arrow. A streak of light tore through the gloomy sky. The jade green arrow was averted by the arch griffin's wind barrier only to turn and pierce the other griffin, probably the arch griffin's male partner, right in the head.

For a second, the arch griffin's movement stopped. It rotated mid air and looked towards the limply falling male griffin. It's attention swayed away from me——and from Aya.

The stopped arch griffin was, without paying any heed to the wind barrier, pulverized by a stone spear. Yes, pulverized. As if it had had a car accident, pieces of meat flew all over the air. Looking towards the place where the stone spear came from, three giant golden magic circles were present. They seemed to be lined up looking like a gun barrel.

While seeing those golden magic circles dissipate, I fell.

Gritting my teeth, and rolling up my body, I tried to reduce the impact as much as I could. While enduring through the pain of branches hitting my back,



something soft carried me right before I hit the ground.

My mantle that had the protection of Sylph should have lessened the momentum of falling but it wasn't nearly enough. Every impact made me feel like my body would fall apart, I stirred on the ground unable to even groan in pain.

"Thank god you are safe."

That familiar voice belonged to my comrade. Opening my eyes weakly, I saw Mururu's face, who was probably holding me. Looking around, I could tell that I was slightly away from the place where I had fallen judging by the broken branches lying on the ground.

Probably, she must have grabbed me mid fall I think. It's a very Mururu-like way of saving someone. If I had hit the ground directly, even with the Sylph's protection, I wouldn't have been okay.

"Do.....Do..I lo..look....okay...to..you?"

"You're alive."

Saying that, she smiled. It wasn't just my imagination that her smile also seemed to have a sense of relief in it. Seeing her smile, I also let go of strength from my body.

[True, it's as she says.]

“It hurts....so much.....that..I could cry though.”

When I tried to move my body a bit, pain ran through all of my body making me freeze. But the pain was proof that I was alive.

But still,

“It sure feels weird to be held like this by you.”(renji)

“is that so?”(mururu)

After all, she was just 15 yrs old, a young girl like her appearance would suggest.

As someone who is 28 yrs old.....almost 29, it feels weird as a man to be held like this by a girl; it's feels surreal. Having Mururu put me down, I sat down on the ground resting my back on a tree. And then finally, I took a breather.

“I've had enough of flying in the sky.”(renji)

“Un. I can't help you in the sky either.”(mururu)

“And falling down is super scary.”

“.....that actually looked a bit fun though.”

Oh please.

Unable to even pass out due to the pain, I waited for Ms Francesca and the others to come for us. I could just have Mururu carry me all the way back but it'd be so embarrassing that I'd never be able to walk openly in Merdiorre ever again.

My body that grown hot due to the intense battle had also cooled down from the rain. And it probably wasn't just my imagination that it hurt even more now.

All my limbs were still functioning, and as far as I can tell, though all of my body hurts, it's not like I'm having trouble breathing or anything. I probably didn't break any bones either. This is just my own judgement but I think I was really lucky that I am hurt only this much even after falling like that from the sky.

[Hm?]

Just as Mururu's wet ears twitched, Ermenhilde sensed a presence at the same time. There, finally, I heard the sound of grass being crushed as someone walked towards us.

Looking up, it was Feirona and the others.

"Yo."

"Seriously. Just looking at you makes me full of worry."(elf)

"I have no excuses."

In the first place, I never intended to go flying like that.

“For some time, I really don’t want to go flying again.”(renji)

“So you do intend to go flying sometime later again?”(elf)

“Yeah, at least one more time.”

To cross over to Abenelm, I need Fafnir to carry me there. So even in the worst case, I need to fly one more time.....considering that I have to return as well, it’d be twice I guess.

Just thinking about it made me feel depressed. I could have Koutarou carry me there with teleport magic but since I don’t understand the theory behind it at all, it honestly scares me. If possible, I don’t want to use that method. Rather than teleportation.....I guess both methods aren’t really good.

“Hm so, let’s return shall we?”

“We need to take care of the nest as well.”

“.....Oh yeah.”

I really want to go back already and sleep on the bed of the inn.

Standing up with Feirona’s help, I took support of his shoulder to walk. Ms

Francesca also helped me stand up while making a worried face.

“Ms Francesca as well, you did well today.”

[I don't think it means much coming from you when you're looking like that you know.]

“Seriously.”

When I gave shrug as usual, I ended up groaning in pain instead.

“I was saved by you again.”(fran)

“Don't worry about it. That wasn't really my intention any way.”(renji)

When I said that, she looked up towards me puzzled. Though I can't shrug, I can laugh right.....I hope I don't give a stiff smile.

“We just fought together, that's all.”(renji)

“fufu. Yes.....yes.”(fran)

“But yeah, this time, the burden on Renji might have been a bit too much.”(elf)

” Not just ‘a bit’ you know?”(renji)

Next time, I'll have Feirona work hard. If it's this guy, he'll probably do everything better than me anyway.

Everyone gave a slight smile.

That's how it should be. Rather than have them worry, seeing them smile puts me more at ease.

"Renji-san."

Aya held my free right hand.

It was shivering, not due to the cold.....I think.

"Thanks Aya. You saved me."

My whole body hurt but I ignored it and gave a smile.

Seriously, being an adult, or rather, a man makes you such a show-off. No matter how much it hurts, you still try to endure it and smile.

Looking at me like that.....while sighing, Aya also gave a smile.

## Chapter 74: Friend

(TL Note: Solnea=Sollunea now)

“Here, Renji-san, I’ve peeled it now.”

As I took the plate while getting up from my bed, a perfectly peeled and cut apple was kept on the said plate.

Looking towards Aya who had done the peeling, the way she was making an expression as if asking me to say how well she did it was really charming. And being aware of how bad and awkward she once was at such things back then, it made it even more charming. Well I did know that she had improved her skills a lot in the period of our journey though. But still, getting taken care of like this by her was a very fresh experience.

“Thanks.”(renji)

“You’re welcome.”

And her voice was slightly excited as well showing that the girl sitting beside my bed was in good spirits. Is it really that fun to take care of injured people eh? Muttering that to myself, I was about to pick up an apple piece when a very sharp pain ran through my right upper arm so I put down the plate on the bed and picked a piece up with my left hand instead.

It has been 3 days since we subjugated those griffins but the pain in my right arm had yet to subside. It was the same for every joint in my body as well and I needed help just to go to even the toilet.

I don’t really consider myself to have a weak constitution but I did fall from the sky and get smacked by multiple tree branches in the way. I think my current condition was unavoidable. Now if I possessed magical energy, I could use healing miracles or enhance my metabolism to increase the recovery speed but, I don’t. and Yayoi-chan wasn’t here either. In such a situation, I really can’t do anything about my injuries.....this is also one of the reasons why I end up considering myself as weak, or a burden.

“Yeah, it’s tasty.”(renji)

But not showing such thoughts on my face, I ate one of the apple pieces and gave my impression.

[.....fruits are sold directly in stalls so is there won’t be much difference in taste anyway though?]

When, the medal placed near my pillow muttered that.

“Well, the centre’s been removed after all.”(renji)

“Renji-san?”(aya)

Her expression was the same but her voice seemed 1 octave lower than her previous energetic voice. Quickly eating the rest of the apple and evading Aya’s questioning, I turned towards Feirona and Sollunea playing chess on the table.

And behind Sollunea, Ms Francesca was standing and teaching various things to Sollunea everytime she made a move. Having Francesca stolen from her, Mururu was sitting on the window and staring outside at the streets of Merdiore with sleepy eyes. Since it’s her, I’m sure she won’t fall but I’ll be more relieved if she just sat down on a chair.....but she’ll reply back saying that she’s bored so it’s useless though.

Such a peaceful scene could be seen inside my room, that is, if there wasn’t me, lying on the bed covered in wounds. I looked almost like mummy considering that allop my body was covered in bandages.

.....Mummy monsters don’t exist in this world though.

“Oi, Mururu, wanna eat an apple?”(renji)

“Un.”

As I held out the plate towards Mururu, she picked up the biggest piece and gulped it down in a single bite.

Cheeky girl. While thinking that, I looked at her with half closed eyes as she ate the apple with swollen cheeks.

“That’s bad manners, you know.”(rneji)

“It’s fine. You’re the only one looking.”(Mururu)



[That's not really the problem here though.]

".....Ermenhilde and Aya were watching too anyway."

When I said that, Mururu turned away to look outside the window again. The fact that her tail was swinging largely was because she was happy to have eaten the apple, or was she actually a bit embarrassed of eating with a big mouth like that I wonder?

In either case, the way she put it made it sound like she was more embarrassed of being seen by the them rather than me.....there's definitely something wrong in her as a girl, I'm sure.

"Aya, you should eat some as well."(renji)

"Sure. Well, maybe just one."

Saying that, she picked up one the slices she had cut herself and opened her mouth by just a third and took a small bite. When she noticed that I was looking, she hurriedly slightly averted her mouth as well. This is what a girl is meant to react like, right?

I wonder how much time passed just like that. Their chase game must have finally ended as Sollunea and Feirona began putting away the chess pieces.

It's been like this for the past few days.

They play chess here from early morning, and Aya or ms Francesca would look after me. Once the chess game was over, they'd head to the guild and do some jobs.

It was almost as if we were adventurers who had decided to become resident adventurers in Merdiore.

"Well then, Renji-san, we'll be going out for a while....."

"Yeah, see you later. Don't be reckless and hurt yourself, okay?"

"Nobody is as reckless as you are Renji."(elf)

"Can't refute that."

When I shrugged my shoulders at his words, I felt a sharp pain in my right arm. How pathetic. He must have also noticed that slight disturbance in me as

Feirona gave a tired sigh. Even if I know it'll hurt, I can't suddenly change my habitual actions, can I?

"Ermenhilde-sama, Sollunea-san, please look after Renji-sama, okay?"(fran)

"I know, Francesca."(sol)

".....do you guys really not trust me at all? How sad."

[Well it's you we're talking about after all.]

"I guess I should be happy that so many people are worried for me eh?"(renji)

Picking up an apple, I said that as I took a bite making everyone laugh. Though I doubt menial jobs from the guild would be much trouble to me, my shoulders still feel pretty weak.

After seeing everyone off, the room became quiet. Lying on bed, I didn't have any topic to talk about, and probably Ermenhilde didn't have one either. And Sollunea wasn't the type to start a conversation in the first place.

Thus, there was no other choice but to enjoy the wind blowing through the window as it made the curtains flutter. Basically, get bored.

"Are your injuries better now?"(sol)

"Yeah, no problems. I'll be back in perfect condition in about ten days."

Saying the same thing as yesterday, I consoled Sollunea. After I was put to bed-rest, she always asks the same question everyday. I really will heal in about ten days, but I doubt I'll be able to move like before though. After all, laying in bed like this, doing nothing is going to put my body out of shape, I'll need more time to get back into form.

As for the wounds, though there are medicines, but due to the restorative miracles of priests, the medical tech hasn't advanced at all. Unlike surgeries etc in our world, they just have to put their hands above the affected part and send in magical energy which is faster and hurts way less. But in that case, someone like me who doesn't have magical energy is unable to get that kind of healing and has no choice but to stay in bed and wait for the wounds to heal naturally.

The only effect healing miracles have on me is reducing the pain slightly, that's all. If it was Yayoi-chan, though it'd take some time, she could heal me

completely but as expected, just because I got slightly hurt, I can't just have her come to Merdior all the way from magic city Ofan. Aya was of the opinion that Yayoi-chan wouldn't mind at all but I'd actually heal up normally by the time she actually reaches here.....I think. I mean, it'll take half a month just to come here from there after all. Considering there are only horses and carriages in this world as modes of transportation, it's only normal. Man I really want a car, or at least a train. Well, considering how much pollution those cause, it'd be instantly rejected in this world. Me included.

"Sorry."

"For what?"(sol)

"Chess, for not being able to play with you."

When I said that, she was expressionless as usual but she did seem to look at me in a slightly curious manner.

My right shoulder didn't move properly, and my left arm was even worse as I was unable to even lift it. My whole body was pretty much in a similar condition, internal damages, in fact, it was a pain to even have a proper meal for the past few days.

The only thing I could handle was stew, that too, only when it had been cooked till the ingredients were all liquid. It felt like I didn't even eat anything. I can eat fruits like apples given to me like how Aya did but it's one of the very few solid eatables I can have right now.

.....I once again resolved myself to take care of my body more. Well, no one could expect that I'd end up falling from the sky, like this time after all.

"I don't mind."(sol)

After a while, Sollunea gave a reply. It was with her usual flat voice but the fact that she took time before replying shows that there are some kind of emotion emerging inside her that even she herself isn't aware of.

"As long as you're alive, we can play after you're healed after all."(sol)

"Well, yeah I guess."

When I shrugged my shoulders again, I groaned from the sharp pain again.

“Renji, you’re alive……and that’s enough.”(sol)

[Is what she says.]

“I almost really did die though.”

If Mururu had not caught me when I fell from the sky, I can’t even imagine what would have happened.

Well, at the very least I would not have been even able to talk like this I’m sure. Now whether I’d be unable to talk forever is…….anyway, in either case, I am realizing this quite late but I really did something dangerous.

This why monster subjugation is scary and dreadful. If possible I want to live without such dangers and live a relaxed life.

“But, you did not die.”(sol)

“Well, I just got lucky.”

And also,

“I promised didn’t I? I tend to keep at least my promises you know?”(renji)

[Just promises?”]

“Yup, just promises. If tried to do more, I’m sure I’d end up breaking even those promises.”

*yawn* as I yawned while saying that, I heard a sigh from Ermenhilde. To not change at all even after all that’s happened, we really are great partners. I’m not gonna say that out loud though.

If I did, she’d only scold me on various things, I’m pretty sure.

“I see.”(sol)

“Hm?”

As I chatted with Ermenhilde, Sollunea stared directly at me. She was making a face as if she had come to some kind of realization.

“What?”(renji)

“No, just, if as long as you promise, you will not ever die, right?”

“…….What’s with the sudden ominous question?”

Well, I guess it'd be too much to ask of Sollunea to not talk so straightforwardly. But it came so suddenly that even I was left unable to reply. Seeing my reaction, I could hear Ermenhilde snickering intentionally which made me uneasy.

"Well then, promise me."

[What about?]

"That you won't die. Renji, promise me."(sol)

In a calm, flat and lacking any sort of emotion, voice. Yet, it felt beautiful to my ears.

Even though I should have gotten used to her voice, those words alone, more than usual—seemed to almost resound inside my head.

"There's no need for a promise. I don't intend to die anytime soon."

Giving a light answer, I took a bite off the apple. Finding the taste adequate, I gulped down the rest in one bite.

While chewing down on it, I averted my thoughts from Sollunea's promise. Even I felt that it was really unfair of me to do that. It's especially not a way to act with someone like Sollunea who has no memories of any sort.

I wonder what she thought of me, but with her usual expressionless face, she simply continued to stare at me.

"What's wrong? Why did you suddenly say something like that?"(renji)

"Was it really so sudden?"(sol)

[Well, it certainly was to be honest.]

There was no logical chain leading to that, I felt. Well, I guess it wasn't too strange for her. It's amazing how much I have gotten used to Sollunea's weird conversations.

I wonder if she realizes that, but anyway, I could also only stare back at her.

"Even without promising anything, I'll safely take you to Abenelm."(renji)

"I'm not really worried about that."(sol)

“.....Really?”

“I am well aware of your strength.”

[fumu.]

That statement only troubles me more you know? At least consider the fact that I almost died facing a griffin. Also, I don't understand why Ermenhilde suddenly sounded so happy there. You of all people should be the most aware of how that fight with those griffins went.

I don't even have the strength to make a retort any longer.

“Now that I think about it, you have always been saying that I won't lose or I'd win from the time we met.”(renji)

“Yes.”

“Why so confident? I feel weird saying this myself but I'm really not that strong you know?”

It really feels pathetic to say this about myself but I'm not sure if I'd win even against the stronger adventurers. Just getting surrounded by multiple goblins can mean death for me.

So why does she, from the moment we met——even when we were in the capital, consider me so strong? Recalling that, I became curious. It's not like her memories returned or anything but she does seem to have some sort of basis behind it all.

“I don't know.”(sol)

[.....after making such a bold statement, that again eh?]

“But, I know you two's strength very well.”

Astraera said that Sollunea was a descendant of the Demon God that we had killed.

Does she have some memories from back then still inside her?.....the memory of me killing him/her.

If that's the case, I feel like that's not a very nice image to have of me. No one would have a very great impression of someone who killed you. Then where do

her emotions or impression of me come from?

While I was thinking of such things, I heard a knock on the door.

“Hm?”

And without waiting for a reply, the door was opened.

The one who appeared was a dwarf with overbearing smile, Dagram, and a white haired, tanned skin young man, Enomiya Yuuichirou.

“.....At least wait till I answer.”(renji)

Was there even a reason to knock the door then? Yuuichirou gave a stiff smile at that and Dagram simply laughed unabashedly.

Seriously.

[What happened? For both of you to come together?]

“Just paying a visit to an injured friend, that’s all.”

“Why thank you. I was almost going to die of boredom.”(renji)

“Even though you didn’t die even after falling from the sky with a griffin? How pathetic Renji.”(Dagram)

Saying that, he put down the bag he held on top of the table, and sat down on a chair.

As usual, this guy has nerves of steel. Well, most dwarves are like this though.

Following after him, Yuuichirou also entered a room and gave a small greeting before sitting down as well.

“What’s that?”(renji)

“Fruits. According to Yuu here, we need to bring fruits when paying a visit right?”

Hearing that I looked towards the bag on the table. Though small, Dwarves can still carry quite the amount in both their hands. Just how much fruit did this guy buy?

My stomach ached just thinking about the contents.

“Thanks, I’ll be sure to eat them later.”(renji)

“That’s right, when injured, the best thing to do is to eat a lot and sleep a lot.”

What a hot blooded theory as usual. Well, he’s not exactly incorrect either though.

“Is that so?”(sol)

“Yeah. Make sure that he eats a lot Missy.”

“Are you trying to make me fat.....”

“If you do get fat, just exercise to get back into shape. In the first place, you’re too thin. Put on some more muscle. What’s with that pitiful arm.”

As Dagram compared his own arm with mine inside his head, I pretended to not hear him and muttered a sigh.

Even I want to put on more muscle you know. That’d make my body sturdier, and stronger. Right now, I still lack endurance and am weak to continuous hits. Do you know how much I have lamented that fact?

But maybe because Dagram knows that, he brought so many fruits. When I thought of it that way, I felt a bit warm inside. But I hope he’d not teach weird things to Sollunea. She’s the type who’d do exactly what’s been told to her.

“So, Yamada-san, how is your body now?”(yuu)

“It’s as you can see.”(renji)

[For a while, he can’t move. Seriously, against a mere Griffin.....how deplorable.]

“Well, that’s about it.”

Seeing Ermenhilde reply in my stead, Yuuichirou gave a wry smile. It must be towards my partner and her too lofty ideals. A ‘mere’ Griffin she says. True, as one of the heroes it might be the right way to put it. Though practically non-existent in Imnesia, they are all around in Elfheim and in Abenelm, they’re not more than a low level Demonic Beast.

If I struggled so much against a mere Griffin, travelling all over Abenelm would sound as a pipe dream. And that’s putting it lightly.



“You could have called me as well when going to fight it.”(yuu)

“If something happened to you, I would get scolded by Seravi-san so..”

“You really worry for the strangest things.....”

“Idiot, I wasn’t really worried or anything.”

Saying that lightly, I bit on the last piece of apple left and gulped it down.

“Even without you, we should’ve won with ease. It was a mere griffin. It’s less than a small fry compared to fighting the Demon God Nayfell one-on-one!”(renji)

[Houu.]

“Oho, talking big today eh Renji?”(dagram)

“It was super easy, I tell you. I mean, it’s a griffin, just a griffin. Once we reach Elfheim, we’ll have to face them like everyday. I went through a bit of trouble this time but that’s just because I didn’t expect to end up against a such an experienced Griffin. It’ll be much easier next time.”

I boasted. Both of them are well aware of my abilities. They also know what’d happen if I face such Griffin alone.

Yet, they said nothing. Probably because I was bluffing while sounding so confident. Even though I had zero confidence. I am scared of fighting and hate getting hurt. But still.

“.....that’s why, don’t worry about me. You should just keep on happily living with Seravi-san.”

With that, I had said everything I wanted to say. He hated fighting. Even though he wished for power to fight, he still hated it, was a coward and a crybaby.

Still, he worked hard for the person he liked, lost her, yet kept on moving forward; I remember it very clearly. Even though I was unable to give him a push in the back, I was still able to fight alongside him and help him.

Why would I not want him to be happy? That little shy crybaby has finally become independent, why would I want to be a hindrance to that?

Yuuichirou looked at me with surprised. His face looked so funny that I laughed silently but the pain in my body made me stiffen up. But it was still so funny that I ended up laughing anyway.

He must have realized what I meant as Dagram also simply picked up an unpeeled apple and laughed with a wide smile. Of course, in a loud voice.

.....by the way, weren't those apples supposed to be a gift for me?

Well, let's just ignore that. Yeah.

[Of course, together, we can do anything.]

Her light words also felt stronger than ever. She must have realized my intention as well.

For a second, hearing us, both Dagram and Yuuichirou went silent and then began to laugh while shaking their shoulders.

That's right. Keep laughing. That's what makes me the happiest as well. Even if I'm injured, even if I'm scared.....

"Don't forget to call me to the wedding okay?"(renji)

"You're jumping way ahead now!!"(yuu)

As long as I have an objective I can work hard. With an aim, I can move forward.

That's the kind of human I am. For someone else, I can fight. For something I can fight. And—without those, I'd end up rotting away. That's simply the kind of man I am.

"Sounds fun."

Seeing us, Sollunea muttered that.

It must have been my imagination that her face looked like she was smiling slightly rather than her usual expressionless face.

## Chapter 75: Nightmare

Dodging the swinging scythe by lowering my waist, I stepped in with all of my strength.

Underneath the ragged red robe, she was wearing a revealing black dress. Fluttering with smallest of actions, that clothing, which pretty much revealed the part which must be hidden, could probably not be called a clothing anymore.

Wearing unrefined gauntlets made with some kind of a monster's bones on both arms, she had jet black wings on the back which resembled the wings of crows. And on her head, a large goat-like horn which did not go with her beautiful face.

In this parallel world, there are many who have king in their names but only one of them held power equal to the Dragon King, Fafnir.

Demon Lord Shelfa.

Unkempt, ruffled, long, purple-silver hair and red eyes like the crimson moon. Abnormally white skin. She had dazzlingly beautiful eyes but it was all ruined by the sinister aura she spread with her enormous scythe.

Having all of it aimed right at me, I dived right in and swung Ere towards her defenseless torso.

But she dodged it with unbelievable speed, leaped behind me and swung her scythe downwards, aiming for me. Swinging that scythe which was even taller than her height with one hand like it was nothing; That appearance truly had the overpowering aura worthy of being called the Demon Lord.

Dodging that attack by tumbling on the rock-hard surface, we started crossing swords once again.

I could hear my breathing getting rough. On the other hand, Shelfa stood before me with an air of composure, looking down on me.

Souichi and Hisaki-san lept on her from behind with their holy swords. But she knocked them off with precise movements using her scythe, almost as if she

had an eye on her back.

Blown away, the two struck a boulder which had moss sprouting on it. The landing seemed to have been bad; They didn't move an inch. Either they had fainted or they were waiting for another opportunity to attack. Either way, being on this side of Shelfa, I couldn't possibly confirm.

Inoue Koutarou – Inoue-kun was fighting to death on top of the enormous tortoise that he named Black Tortoise.

“Pathetic. So this is the heroes Astraera called from the other world?”

‘Pathetic, pathetic’ she went on. Destroying everything in her sight with a swing of her sight, she kept laughing jovially. With a swing of her sight, a part of the tortoise's back was sliced off.

She was laughing but there wasn't the slightest bit of cloudiness in her murderous intent. That murderous intent felt familiar somehow. It closely resembled that of Neifel. No, if there's such a thing like density to ‘killing intent’, then that was probably lesser than this.

And so, I stood up once again, staring right at the Demon Lord as she was laughing.

She looked surprised for a moment, then she gave a broad smile and said,

“Yes, yes. That's good, hero. Don't break so easily.”

Her charming lips distorted like the crescent moon, and she licked those lips with her long, red, snake-like tongue. The smile of a demon one would see in a movie or a manga. A smile exactly like that, swollen up with madness.

Her abnormally white cheeks were turning a little red, not out of joy, but out of excitement. We were being driven into a corner but I tried to calm down and observe the Demon Lord.

The foothold (Black Tortoise) started shaking. Even now, the biggest, strongest retainers of the Devil God in Imnesia continent were advancing towards the royal capital. At this rate, they will reach there in half a day and trample over it.

We must defeat the Demon Lord as soon as possible and subjugate this.

I took deep breaths; Once, twice, thrice.

“Ere, let’s do this.”

“”Yes. As you wish, to your heart’s content.””

I gripped Ere with both hands and imagined mustering up all my strength.

A marrow travelled along the jade-green body of the blade.

Absolutely not breaking, not bending, not crumbling.

The Absolute Marrow.

“—Lend me your strength. Ere... Astraera-sama.”

It shined. The magic overflowing from the jade green blade, from my body.

More.

More.

More.

More —- Shine even more!

“Did you make up your resolve?”

“I will chop off that wing of yours and knock you down from here.”

In an instant, Shelfa disappeared from my sight and swung her sight down towards me with unimaginable speed.

As I leapt to the left to dodge, it hit the Black Tortoise’s back and exploded. It had the power to destroy not only the rock hard surface, but also its shell.

But I had no time to even be surprised by it as she instantly sprung forward with her giant scythe, which I blocked with my sword.

As my sword and her scythe collided, for a moment, sparks scattered.

Blocking the unique shape of the scythe was difficult.

This was only a one-time only scheme. That one-time only scheme managed to surprise Shelfa just as I had imagined.

Kicking the ground so strongly as to pulverize it, I leapt in aiming for her chest. Shelfa also jumped back like she did before but I took one more step faster. I

already saw how she dodged once.

And like that, I sliced with Ere.

Without feeling even the slightest of resistance, I chopped off her right hand and her crow-like wings as I had declared. Her small figure fluttered in the air.

I knocked her off. I cut her wings so she shouldn't be able to fly anymore.

—But immediately after, I was hit with a magical bullet and blown away.

I dropped from the Black Tortoise's back.

—Thump.

For a moment there, I couldn't understand what had just happened.

As I surveyed the surroundings, I saw a familiar room and Feirona's surprised face looking right at me.

[What are you doing.....?]

And then, a voice resounded in my head. It was probably not my imagination that the voice was very astounded.

After a while, I finally grasped my current condition.

And at the same time, the door was violently knocked.

“What is it?!”

I couldn't see who it was because of Feirona's bed so I tried to judge by the voice.

[It's nothing. Renji just fell from the bed while asleep.]

That seems to be my current condition.

It seems to me that the voice explaining now seemed to be pitying me more than being astounded.

“.....Ouch”

[Wake up already. Pathetic.]

Being told that, I finally stood up properly. I seemed to have fallen into quite the weird position because my neck was hurting quite a lot.

Judging from the light of the crimson moon flowing in through the window, it was nighttime. It looks like I fell off the bed at quite the weird time.

“Ah— Sorry. I was probably half-asleep.”

When I said that, Aya and Mururu, who were at the back, let out a sigh of relief.

I seemed to have surprised them a lot.

“Don’t worry about it. How do you feel? Does it hurt anywhere?”

“I seem to have hit my head. Ah, and also, my neck hurts.”

Sitting down on my bed, I massaged my left shoulder with my right hand. And as I did that, the pain immediately disappeared. It seemed to have been a temporary pain.

As I did the same to my left shoulder, the pain on my neck disappeared. In fact, the wound I received from the griffin subjugation we did a few weeks ago throbbed a little. Compared to that, this didn’t hurt much, so I decided to ignore it.

“Are you okay? Should I massage your shoulder?”

“Ah, I am fine, I am fine. I just had a bad dream.”

After saying that to the worried Aya, I stretched a bit. It was quite bright outside even though it was night time.

When I turned to look outside the window, I noticed that it was a full moon today. It is always scarlet but tonight, it seems blood-red.... I thought I had gotten used to it but it certainly wasn’t a good night.

I also had that dream just now, making me feel something bad was going to happen.

[You weren’t really making any noise while sleeping but did you see a nightmare?]

“Ah, yea, a bit.”

“What kind of a dream?”

“I also got up due to your sudden eccentric behaviour.”

“Don’t call it eccentric. You will make me cry.”

Seriously. As I let out a sigh, Aya sat on my bed and Mururu sat on Feirona’s bed.

“.....What?”

“I am interested.”

“It was the first time Renji-san fell off from the bed. I am also a bit interested.”

Hearing their words, I once again let out a deep sigh.

I don’t really think it is that interesting of a dream.

“What about Sollunea?”

“Shall I go call her?”

“No, it’s okay.”

It’s not something I would like many people to hear.

“I saw a dream. Black Tortoise — the biggest, strongest underling of the Devil God in Imnesia continent. I was fighting with the Demon Lord on its back.”

“.... the Demon Lord.”

Mururu seemed to be pondering over what I said.

The Demon Lord Shelfa.

That name is well known in Imnesia continent. The strongest demonic race. The strongest demon. The one who rules over demons.

Lord of the demons, she who is worthy of that name.

There are many different names or titles for her but one thing is for sure.

She is abnormally strong.

Even among the 13 of us, the ones who excel in close combat, Souichi and Masaki, were easily dealt with even when they attacked at once.

I feel like Feirona and Mururu became stiff after hearing her name.

To relieve them of the stress, I lightly tapped their shoulder and said,



“It was a dream. It was a long time ago.”

“By a long time ago... you mean you actually fought with the Demon Lord?”

“Well, yea.”

Although for me, it was nothing but a nightmare.

After that one fight, I caught Shelfa’s eye and from then on, she has challenged me to fights, picked fights with me, came attacking me and what not.

.....Really, it is such a nightmare.

As I let out yet another sigh, Aya gently stroke my back to console me. It was like comforting a kid. When I looked at Aya, she gave me a bitter smile as she knew my hardships.

“From the looks of it, it does not seem to be a happy memory.”

“I almost died a few times.”

Especially when I fell off the back of the Black Tortoise, Fafnir or Anastasia weren’t there so I really thought I would just fall to my death. Is it because of that I was falling just now... I guess that would be thinking too much into it.

“That is pretty rare, for you to see a dream with Shelfa in it.”

“Tell me about it. Ah, I so hate it. Let’s just go back to sleep.”

Aya, who had known how much I didn’t like it, didn’t say anything and stood up.

Sensing that that was the end of the conversation, Mururu also got up.

“Well then, good night.”

“Good night.”

“Ah, sorry for waking you guys up.”

Saying ‘It’s alright.’, Aya and Mururu returned to their rooms. Feirona, Eremenhilde and I were the ones left.

The room got silent at once.

“Well, let us go to sleep as well then.”

“Yep.”

[We need to wake up early tomorrow.]

“I know, I know.”

Tomorrow, we need to prepare for the voyage, and the thing I asked Kudou about.... as I lied down on the bed, I instantly felt sleepy.

I could already hear sleepy breathing from the bed next to mine.

‘That was fast’, as I thought that, I looked up at the crimson moon outside the window.

Ah, what an unpleasant moon.

Did I remember about Shelfa because of the full moon or is my intuition trying to tell me something?

Either way, Shelfa is in the Avenema continent. It would surely be difficult to appear here on the Imnesia continent when the Devil God is not present.

Being relieved because of that thought, I closed my eyes.

## Chapter 76: Silver Ghost's Sword ①

Cling, clang. Cling, clang.

I can hear metal striking from far away. As I listen, I think of breakfast... no, yesterday's di—lunch? Perhaps I'm thinking of the dishes and utensils we used a few days ago.

I scrub stubborn residue from dishes with a washcloth and then hand them over to Miss Francesca, who wipes them dry. Then, Miss Francesca Sollunea takes the dishes dried off by Miss Francesca, and stores them neatly on a shelf.

Miss Francesca, rather than wearing her customary blue mantle, now wears a lavishly frilly white apron. Sollunea, of course follows, but wears a pink apron. Maintaining her cool composure, the beautiful pink-aproned Sollunea appears quite surreal.

These aprons – why on earth would one be interested something like that? It's not that they're bad, but to be honest, except for being fitting for Miss Francesca, I think it's not a house-owner like thing to use. But really, while they *are* aprons, they are nice and like new. They are likely to never be used again.

Why would someone used to live alone have a whole bunch of aprons to use in the first place? And, they come in all sorts of colors. Just from here, I can see three different ones hanging on the back wall.

[What's wrong, Renji?]

"Nothing. But why would they be using aprons that were never to be used?"

[Don't put it like that...]

Ermenhilde's words had no power because she herself would most certainly not use them, I imagine.

In another world, I tightened a water faucet that wasn't installed properly and wiped my wet hands with a dry towel. The sink I saw before, which was full of dirty dishes, is from the looks of it has been cleaned.

If I could, I would clean up every corner of this place. But then landlord of this

house would start to not clean at all and everything would get messed up again. Then I would be drive once again to clean the whole place. In any case it's the landlord's problem whether this place is clean or not, regardless if he does any cleaning or not.

At that time, even with fists dropping in my head, I driven to clean.

"Looks like everything's been tidied up."

[Only on the surface.]

Replying to Miss Francesca's voice, Ermenhilde's true intentions behind those words remained hidden as she looked up. Answering with a cute shrug of the shoulders, she continues directing her gaze towards the second floor.

In another world, even with a ceiling of unfitting, hardened concrete I could hear Aya's loud, reverberating voice through the wall and bed. Probably hearing that same voice, Miss Francesca looked up at me and smiled wryly.

The first floor used to be a place for luggage but has since been changed into a living room and guest room. Besides that, there's a bathroom, a work room... a room for taking care of housework, an alchemy room, a medicine room...

Looking at it from the outside, it seems like any other normal house. But inside, it can only be described as the confused creation of a lunatic. The house itself is made of concrete with black, discolored walls strung with dried lizards, wings of bats, hallucinogenic medicinal plant, and other curios.

Taking a whiff of one of those potent plants, which become stronger when dried, I felt really dizzy. If I hadn't opened some windows, I'd probably have ended up a drug addict—though, these plants are not illegal drugs.

Doing a major cleaning, Miss Francesca, Sollunea, and I deal with this madness while Aya and Mururu take care of second floor and Feirona handles the front entrance.

It's because it's so dirty here.

...should I call them my old companions, or my friends? I want them to be able to understand my feelings through how I refer to them.

Showing friends some house, only to find out it's haunted. I can't get myself

to smile to laugh.

Miss Francesca is grinning now, enjoying cleaning. But when we first got here, I was anxious because I didn't know what to do. Evidently, Feirona and Mururu are talking less than when we first arrived. As usual, Sollunea looks indifferent. Someday, I would like to see Sollunea show some surprise.

*Now then, what shall we do next?*

Just as I was thinking this, someone came down from the stairs leading to the second floor. I turned to see a beautiful pair of legs in black stockings. It's Aya.

"Aya, that's—"

"Hey. Don't look at me like that."

Whenever I greet her, she always replies in a louder voice. She's probably surprised that the luggage I hold is luggage indeed.

From a distance, it appears smaller than an apron, but it's also colorful fabric—well, it's what's called undergarments. Aka lingerie.

That piece of cloth, for some reason, taking a moment to register, caused a flustered Miss Francesca to hurry down the stairs, grab half of the laundry, and dash off toward the dressing room.

As Aya came downstairs, she gave me the other half of the laundry, still enough to hold in both arms, and continued her way.

.... Now that I think about it, how many weeks of laundry have accumulated on the second floor? Just thinking about it is horrible. For Mururu's sharp sense of smell, is it not hell? Concerning a woman's smell, I want to stop thinking about it.

As I still thought, I picked up a black cloth with my fingers, which had fallen after Aya and Miss Francesca had passed. Cloth is cloth, no matter its layout, right? I thought of someone I could show this to.

[What are you doing?]

It was a cold voice.

While listening to the neutral voice that could be taken as either man or

woman, I felt different from the gaze I saw, as Sollunea glanced at the cloth in my hand. It's a thong. Whatever.

"Do you like those types of things?"

"It's not like that."

Straight to the point. I carried a bitter smile as I grasped the cloth piece that I held between my fingers. It is a stupid sight that a man looks forever at underwear like this.

At the same time, Mururu comes down from the second floor. She has laundry in her arms just like Aya, so it's hard to differentiate her because of their similar heights. I'm coming down the stairs with a feeling of stupidity.

"Halfway done."

"Yup."

As I speak, Mururu is unable to see what I am holding. In the protruding direction, Sollunea stares at me like I'm in trouble.

I'm suspected to be a beast. Even if I block her field of vision, someone will come to understand her worried look.

While in an awkward position, I receive another pile of laundry from the side. ...I think it's going tough washing all of this. There is no such thing as a washing machine here, so all washing is done by hand. As there is still a lot to do, I don't plan to finish doing the laundry, but I still think it's troublesome.

I quietly hide the garment that I held in my hands into the laundry, and head for the washroom. Behind the house, next to the renovated washroom is a well-maintained water system. It seems that it is pumping water from a well nearby, I wonder how it works?

I don't know how long it will take others to understand, but I think that water supply is not suitable for different worlds. Even so, guns and cars are still viewed as common, so it's still good, but... It's Kotarou's saying that guns and cars are just rocks in the world of swords and magic.

I agree with him, but iron-making technology has not developed enough to make guns and cars. Before then, there was no fuel, and no knowledge

available in this world even if they did try. Even if it is only an imitation, even preparing a screw will take a lot of time, plus, it's hard to understand how gasoline moves a car. Even if we tell them how to make these items, only we will be able to use them properly.

Guns and cars are precise. If you distort the barrel just a little bit, or do not use the right pieces for the car, you can hurt someone or not have a running car. Since we don't know how to repair them, we cannot make them either. It is not realistic because only Kudou would know how to do it.

Most of all, the exhaust gas emitted by the car affects nature. For that reason, we are refraining from using modern technology that is too prominent.

Is the tap water part of the maintenance system? Well, it is necessary to make life easier, not to spoil the world if it is about water service.

Even so, although the sewerage technology has not developed enough to have proper water supply even in Mediore, what has become the price of land?

Well, Aya and Miss Francesca have already started washing clothes, underwear, sheets, *etc.* with washing boards in the washroom.

"That seems difficult."

"Renji-san."

"Yes?"

"We are fine here, please clean the entrance with Feirona-san."

"Got it," I replied briefly to Aya with a smile, putting the baggage in my hand and turning right.

Apart from maliciousness, I think it is rude to have a man in a place where women are washing clothes and underwear.

I asked Sollunea to help Aya and Mururu, and headed towards the entrance as I was told.

Although the building is made of concrete, the door is made of wood unique to the living world. ...Were wooden doors also common in our world?

When I got out from the entrance while recalling that, I saw Feirona with a

broom cleaning with dexterity. He is handsome no matter what he does. Being a handsome young man is a privilege. I stand right next to him. There is a slight twinkle of a person who would be able to get a woman of marriage glittering here and there — not me, but Feirona. God damn.

While feeling a meaningless sense of defeat in my mind, I pick up the other broom.

“Help me.”

“Sure.”

Less words, more cleaning.

Is what I think, but it seems that it is almost over already. As usual, he performs like a good guy.

“It’s crowded in there, isn’t it?”

“What, were you lonely?”

“Hmph. Maybe, I guess.”

He made me speak a little, however his words stopped him from cleaning.

It may not be lonely, but it may be that it was certainly boring to say that cleaning the entrance door by myself was one thing. Well, it might have been entertaining just watching him clean.

“Well, I’m worried about crowds too.”

[I know, right?]

“Did something happen?”

Ermenhilde takes the words right out of my mouth. Interested in who replied, Feirona stopped her hand and turned to gaze. Ermenhilde shrugged her shoulders and spoke.

“What? When cleaning a woman’s house, the man is in the way.”

“Huh?”

“To put it briefly, there were a lot of problems with the laundry.”

“Ah, I see.”



It seems like he must figure out what I want to say, and it strikes me as if I am just an acquaintance.

“It is hard to be loved, “ Feirona said, amusingly.

It seems that he’s talking more than before, but I don’t care too much.

I am aware, though.

I do not know whether it is love or not, but Aya, Miss Francesca, and Mururu are strangely sweet.

Aya has times where she seems to like to show skin, but I am doubtful that she has been intending to dress like this.

A trip to save the world... It may not be such a big trip as to say, but it is still a life-long journey. Aya should know about it—perhaps, because she knows.

If you think about, it’s hard to confidently say it. Adventurers... we have no idea when we will die. Most importantly, we must be able to leave something without any regrets.

I know that. Those who have tried so hard and became exhausted, those who cried without fulfilling their purpose, and those who were not able to keep promises. Maybe Aya’s actions are the result of seeing so many people in this state.

Well, in other words.

“Stop looking at me like that.”

“I don’t intend to.”

When I sigh, Feirona laughs and smiles.

“I’m older than you, so listen to me.”

“Sure, sure.”

“Be more serious.”

“I know.”

I say that, but Feirona keeps cleaning with no worries.

However, there hasn’t been any visible garbage falling to the entrance of

Kudou's house anymore. It seems that it is also to keep the conversation going that I keep on cleaning.

"Besides, it is impossible for Kudou to be strange to me."

"Did you say that to Rin?"

"No, I didn't have anything to say because there was nothing to talk about."

For example, drinking alcohol at night, watching stars, and talking about firefighters.

Even if I spend that kind of time with her, there is nothing between me and Kudou. If said strictly, there are things like friendship and similarities between similar people. I have never spent time with her.

Neither I nor Kudou know well of each other. I may have known a little about her when I was summoned to this world, but it feels like a long time ago. Or perhaps I have not been conscious of our interactions recently. Cleaning this way, I think of the lingerie I found. I think whether it is hers. I want to think I am not a bad person.

I guess I am now making bad jokes.

So... well...

"I have good taste, and that is too flamboyant for my style."

"I see."

Not knowing how serious his answer was, we resumed cleaning.

Since there was no longer debris falling from above, it must seem stupid that we are still cleaning.

"I have not felt this way until now, but maybe in the future, I wonder if I might have anxiety."

"I think it is impossible, but...."

"Keep it in mind."

"I understand, I should remember my senpai's words for life."

"Good."

From the one round with Griffin, Aya is often aware of me. I'm not as careful as I thought I was, but I am aware. I don't just have pride for myself.

As for today, it will pass, and as I said before, just seeing Kudou's underwear.... I will not be the same. Rather, I can say that I am accustomed to Kudou being my comrade too much and lack a sense of delicacy.

Is it a change of mind, or a woman's heart? I don't understand men's point of — this way of escape is about to be useless.

“.....”

“The hell?”

Feeling a gaze, I turned towards Feirona.

“What? I don't have anything to say that I know of.”

“Mhmm.”

Jokingly saying so, the door of Kudou's house opened as though it had been perfect timing. Kudo, who is in front of the entrance, is covered in soot and dirt. There are famous words which state that a beautiful woman will not react even when dirtied. Since it did not come to mind, I do not tell her. Although I would love to see her reaction.

Well, no matter how good your appearance is, I'll still feel sleepy, or have a lack of motivation that can cool down a hundred years of love.

“Oh, you're still here.”

“What do you mean?”

“Not you, Renji. Him.”

As usual, she has no concern for me.

“What was the spelling of “Raelphia” with the letters that elves use?”

“You remember that much.”

“Unlike Yamada-san, I remember things such as these.”

I think about whether that is true.

While thinking so, she writes the word “Raelphia” on the ground with a

broom. Because it is cobblestone, there is no actual trace of her words, but it seems that she remembers, as she murmured the letters.

“Thank you.”

It was not particularly spelled out with magical light, but apparently Kudo understands it.

Because it was a character that I wrote before, I know I remember a little bit.

“Hey, Kudou.”

“What? Just wait for me to finish, I’ll be happy if you do.”

“Not what I mean. This underwear, wash it yourself.”

“You’ve been collecting them, haven’t you?”

Even though she will not do it herself, I manage to stay quiet. I can tell. I’d rather actually have a conversation. But for some reason, both me and Kudou do not dislike this stupid conversation. We are fools to talk to each other, but we have a relationship, whether it is a deep bond or not.

“No, but don’t ask your colleagues to wash your underwear,” I said, as I received a cheerful reply.

“Is that mythril sword cheap?”

[I don’t think that’s a problem, but...]

“Go die.”

“Wow. If Yamada-san had lust for me, I would make fun of Aya.”

“Don’t tell me I have lust for a girl that age.”

It seems she really doesn’t care how she talks to me. I sigh back at her disgusting voice. When I gazed at my shoulders and looked towards Feirona, I saw his tired look.

“Well then, clean up, thank you.”

She closed the door.

“Do you think there is something between me and Kudou?”

“...even if you think there is, you can make sure you have good relations with

each other.”

“Good relations.”

But that is a relationship. More or less. That is our relationship. Friends who are easygoing and casual. That’s all I want, nothing more. Surely Kudou feels the same way. Maybe.

I am not Kudou, so I do not understand her thinking exactly. At least I won’t wash another gender’s clothes, albeit underwear, normally.

“Even so...”

“Hmm?”

“Do you know the alphabet of the elves?”

It’s probably something we talked about the other day.

“Raelphia.”

“Ra” is fire, water, wind, and earth. It represents the so-called “four-spirits”, “four attributes”.

“Elfia” refers to the things in this world.

Perhaps Kudou is engraving on the Mithril sword who was asking for the word of magical power with the character of the Elf so that it could sense the influence of these four spirits who are supposed to make up this world.

As I anticipated it, I breathed out, seeing Feirona’s admiration.

“You’re well informed.”

“To travel with Aya, I must not only be able to carry a sword, but also carry intelligence.”

I studied desperately, you know...

If you have no abilities, great effort, guts, and studying, will cover your weaknesses. In our world, this happens in developments like cartoons which were popular in the nineties. Characters who were hot-blooded.

Even though I came from that world, here it is different, and cannot be helped. Thanks to that, I can help in many ways.

“You’re a hard worker, aren’t you?”

“Stop it~ It doesn’t suit me to have you overestimate me like that.”

[I didn’t think that much, but...]

“To be called a hard worker means I have to continue to be one. I am just desperate, not hard working.”

Finally, I returned the broom to its area and stretched.

Fair weather today. It will soon be a warm season, and a good time for some exercise.

“I know it’s a request, but, I hope we did a good job.”

“It’s fine, because you, Renji, and your friends have completed it.”

“Of course.”

There was confidence in that response.

We don’t share the same feelings, lethargic Kudou Rin.

However, her blacksmith techniques are the real deal. A dwarf taught her, an elf granted her magical powers, and she recieved divine protection from Astraera.

That’s why I requested help.

From here on out, the strong goblins and beasts—perhaps we will battle again.

To fight like that... and see Miss Francesca’s new sword.

## Chapter 77: Silver Ghost's Sword ②

In a word, young Francesca Barton can perhaps best be described as a *magician*.

Though only commanding a few magical powers, she has survived to the present-day learning *tai-sabaki* (body positioning in martial arts such as kendo and judo) and sword-fighting through careful observation and imitation. Her status as a magician is attested by her experience as an adventurer.

A cloudless sky. Behind Kudou's house, some recently washed clothes and sheets, fresh white out of the laundry hang drying. Fluttering in the wind, the clothes have a faint fresh smell and carry a strong ocean aroma. Removing my overcoat, I place it in the corner together with Ermenhilde. Then, I toss my sheathed short sword to Miss Francesca who stands facing me.

"Draw it"

With those two words, she nervously pulled out the short sword I just tossed to her.

A sword infused with Mythril.

The blade is engraved with the letters of elves and fairies, the hilt decorated with silver, effective against the undead and ghosts. Just how much is this sword Miss Francesca is holding worth?

Kudou, who forged the sword, wears her usual indifferent expression, but reveals a faint glimpse of interest through her gaze. She is probably interested in the user of the sword she made.

Feeling Kudou's gaze even without looking, I too draw a Mythril blade from my hip. With a blade that is about twice the length of the sword that Miss Francesca is holding, this is a longsword. As she turned her blade towards me, she grew nervous and stiffened up.

"Come hit me."

She spun and turned the sword she held in her right hand by just using her wrist. In that moment, Miss Francesca acted and took aim at me. I am still

turning my sword, so I cannot properly aim at her. Therefore, she took the chance.

She told me to hit her, but it doesn't look like she's going easy on me. Not even an adult, and she has pulled up the strength of an adult man solely through magical power.

Magicians use magic, but there is more to it than just magical power. You can use that magical power to strengthen your physical abilities. Magicians think more about what people do unconsciously. Depending on the user, this process can have increased effects.

Using her magical powers, she reaches me before I could prepare my sword.

I aim for her stomach.

Miss Francesca thinks using her skill will make it hard to target her wrist or neck. That's why I aim here. Plus, if torn in the abdomen, the internal organs will become useless. Since aiming for the heart or brain could lead to instant death, I decide to use this surprise attack.

It is probably the best time to use a surprise attack like this.

"Ngh!"

Miss Francesca's voice rose in agony.

A blow from the side made her fall. I struck the Mythril sword she holds with the sword in my left hand. Although it was a strong blow, I keep hold of my sword and fall back. I take advantage of the time it takes Miss Francesca to check her sword.

With the distance now between us, she cannot attack immediately. Apparently, she seems to have been more vigilant than necessary. I wonder if she will not attack simply because hold a higher position than her? Even though we are just both adventurers.

Should I have improved my attack? Pain makes people more aware. For better or worse, it is when one is in pain when they are most vigilant.

"Come on!"

I swing the sword again in the empty space. A clear break. I thought if I should



aim at the abdomen again, or perhaps for the neck, but I know I will not be able to get a chance like this again.

Even though this is another good chance for a surprise attack, Miss Francesca knows me well, since we've traveled together for nearly half a year already. She'll be able remember my habits.

For example, when we eat meals together, or when I say something with just a smile.

In this troubled state, her eyes swam and the tip of her sword shook. I get close to Miss Francesca, who shows an opening, and aim for the neck with my sword. Of course, I plan to stop before striking her, but she happens to avoid me by quickly turning around. The tip of my sword tore the white ribbon which tied her hair together, causing her hair to flutter around in the air. It looks just like an elegant dance; could this be her "beauty"?

This time she raises her sword, but I match her movements and raise my own sword made of Mythril, and make her turn away.

*It's only been half a year. When I first met you, you didn't even know how to hold a sword, but now we're on par.*

I'm envious and proud of her at the same time.

I don't know if she has talent swinging a sword, but.... I have no more talent than her.

Most of the people in this world are strong but have no magical powers, and therefore receive little protection from the Goddess Astraera.

Those facts are like walls that cannot be broken, and cannot be overcome, no matter how much an effort one makes.

Just by counting, my right hand becomes numb. The strength of Miss Francesca's magical power has already become stronger than me. Before, she did not know how to use magic efficiently, but now that she has been traveling with me and has been experiencing actual combat, her skills far exceed the other magicians of her generation.

I jump to avoid a blow to my legs, slightly doubting whether I would come

back to the ground, as I become defenseless in midair with invisible bullets shooting at me.

Wind magic. Faster than before, she tries to create a strong attack but fails, insufficient to blow me away. I hold my ground and gaze towards her, making sure she doesn't escape, and close the distance between us.

I swing my sword downwards as her gun comes from the side, aiming at her neck. We clash countless times, our hands eventually becoming tired from their grips. I notice my hands getting sweaty.

That is why—.

“Huff.”

I appear to look tired and take in a breath, creating a space between us. Even though I'm in the midst of a fight, I use all my power while lowering my right arm, dripping with sweat as I hold my Mythril sword. Seeing my state, Miss Francesca's attacks momentarily weakened.

Without pause, I slash with my sword from the bottom. She fires her gun using her arm which once held the Mythril short sword.

We both look up at the short sword spinning in the sunlight, then I grab the handle of the falling sword.

“Ah”

Finally, a sound escaped Miss Francesca's mouth.

“It's my win, isn't it,” I said.

[Was it a match?]

*Oh, good.* I sigh in relief as Ermenhilde's voice echoes in my head. Responding to her voice with a cheerful laugh, I throw over the short sword back to Miss Francesca. She is not surprised by my gesture, but it seems she watches my actions in remembrance not to get injured.

“How is your sword? Was it hard to use?” [Renji]

“It's alright. It was very easy to grasp, and it seems my magic has grown stronger...” [Francesca]

“It’s thanks to the character engraved on the sword.” [Renji]

“Huh?” [Francesca]

Miss Francesca gazes at the blade, as the sun shines on her short sword.

“This engraving on the sword’s blade. It’s a character from the old language of the elves, isn’t it?”

“...Really? I’ve only seen them in books.”

“Yeah, centu— milleniums years old. In the era where humans and elves did not communicate with each other.”

This may be a character from when the humans initially had no awareness that elves existed. I’m not a historian so I don’t really have any interest in it but, when I think about it, I wonder how many years has this planet been around.

Thinking about it, whether I understand it or not, I decide to exchange my thoughts with Miss Francesca, since she felt me looking her way.

I know I have a bad habit of being unresponsive when I’m thinking about something.

“If you go to the Elf Realm, you can see it as much as you want.”

Whether she was surprised by my words, in an instant she carried a firm state of doubt, her glossy lips opening to speak in a voice an octave lower than usual.

Well, since even young elves do not understand this character, it is natural that Miss Francesca doesn’t know it either.

A friend from the Elf Realm taught me these words that not many other people know. No matter how venerable a school of magic they went to, or how intertwined their city was with sorcery, it is not a common character to be just written in a book at a library. This one character holds great meaning which can give immense power, and by connecting with it one has the ability to achieve its effects multiple times. Depending on the user, the symbol can have an effect like that of a cheat.

.....I think Kudou decided to engrave that character on the sword in exchange for cleaning the house.

I'm glad she helped, but. When I received my great mantle and Ermenhilde back from Aya, I felt her staring at me. It seems as if Feirona is staring at me as well.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing..."

"That last one was unfair."

Mururu speaks for Feirona's silent stare. It seems his stare contains embarrassment rather than praise, but I don't mind. Initially, I felt glum that I received praise for a win from Miss Francesca, who has little experience.

However, she became strong when I wasn't looking. I told her of my admiration for her out loud. Although I do not plan to lose, even if I slash from the front, it will be painful if I do not take advantage of her weak point. Noticing that opening, Aya and Feirona cast their tepid glances towards me, their pleading kindness piercing my heart.

"Stuupid. You think monsters will play fair and square in an actual war?"

"Uh"

Well, I don't think monsters would gather such a crowd. On top of that, wear a mantle cloak.

"You have an extremely interesting way of fighting, don't you?"

"Yes?"

"Your disciple."

"Ah, them. To be called a disciple is..."

I shrugged as I saw Miss Francesca taking in Kudou's words so humbly. Kudou got up from the bench, with an urge to say something.

"Well, she seems to be able to use my sword more than enough." [Kudou]

"Did she pass?" [Renji]

"It's not my decision. I made it. That assessment is up to the user." [Kudou]

Liar. You usually get angry if a person doesn't polish their skills to the finest

level. If that is truly the sense of a craftsman. This is why I needed to show Miss Francesca's actual abilities in front of Kudou.

I asked Kudou to create this sword for Miss Francesca, so I couldn't tell her that, but.. Putting Kudou's obsessions aside — she is able to create more than just plain potions— she can make effective drugs and other weapons, with the protection of the Goddess. That is the power of Kudou, a craftswoman like no other.

She also has knowledge of the human world, which gives her the advantage to be able to create tools that craftsmen have never thought of in this world. One of the things she made is the Mythril sword that each Aya and I carry around our waists. On the other hand, it doesn't necessarily do better than the dwarve's or elve's complex technology. The effect of those implementations are tremendous, and could potentially beat the power of a Mythril sword.

.....However, if she *does* implement magical power..

"Well, it looks like you'll make it. I hit you with my sword, but because of your defense"

"Yes, I will keep it in mind.... Thank you"

"Thank you very much~"

Kudou says no more, turning her back on the troublesome atmosphere as she tries to get back into her house. She seemed to enjoy making the sword, but is now tired.

Such a woman, that Kudou. Now Miss Francesca can bow her head without being embarrassed.

"It's getting hot, isn't it."

[I don't think it's hot?]

"You are, aren't you. It's impossible for me. My sweat evaporates as soon as it comes."

Although I don't feel sweaty, I wonder if it was better not to tell her. In any case, I don't feel bad about what I said.

Seeing Kudou with a bothered look makes me worry if I am starting to have

the same tired expression. Although it's been happening with me recently, I don't want to send off the message that life is a bore.

"Heh. Rin-san, it's hard being hot-headed, isn't it."

"...Neither me nor Miss Francesca carry that sort of personality, though."

[Is it okay to do it?]

"No way, I'm tired."

[You guys really match, you and Rin.]

"I want to think up to now it's not been horrible."

"Same as ever, huh, Yamada-san."

Kudou looks at me with a tired expression, but I don't mind since it is the usual. In cases like these, she often doesn't talk much. Even though we notice, Feirona and the others probably will forget when they leave.

I don't think it's rude, but I think it is bad since I have the feeling of "I don't care."

Though it's not to that extent now, I used to never really have an interest. When I was first summoned to this world, I remember actually being kept inside a designated room. ....Even though I didn't have to drag out those memories, they were pretty tough times.

Just recalling them, I start to tear up.

I try figuring out what Kudou's interests are, and what makes her light up. More than half of the reason is not because Kudou is an alchemist, doctor, or blacksmith, but because she has become familiar with medicinal plants and various minerals.

Thanks to that, even as an adventurer, she has the ability to relax. After all, knowledge is power.

"Aya. It's not too late to throw out Yamada-san, this tsundere."

"Don't say that, Rin-san!"

"How frightening. However I don't deny being a tsundere."

“There you go.. I guess.”

[What is a tsundere?]

“Don’t listen to them!”

Are they pleased to hear a man like me is a tsundere? Of course not.

Even though I’m not happy, I don’t consider myself a tsundere.

If anything, I think it’s one of my natural traits.

I sigh deeply, and pull at my sleeve. As I glance towards Sollunea, I see a deeply interested expression on her face.

.....It gave me a bad feeling.

“What’s a tsundere?”

“Well. Ask Aya.”

“Renji-san!?”

Responding immediately, Aya looks at me in surprise. Actually, it’s strange that girls can explain tsundere so well. I don’t care how Aya explains it. She’s smart, so I think she can explain it better than I can. Where do tsunderes fit in?

Kudou comes back in the house, listening from a completely different perspective. I think I should say something.

It seems that except for Aya and me, Feirona and the others hold a little resistance towards this word.

They are probably afraid of what a tsundere could be. On the other hand, Koutarou’s *chūnibyō* personality could prove more troublesome.

(T/N: *chūnibyō* refers to a “sickness” in teenagers characterized by sophomoric, edgy and pretentious behavior)

As I ponder, I look over at the open door.

“Thanks for cleaning the house.”

“What would you do without us?”

“It was too troublesome to hire a maid, that’s all.”

Hearing that, both Aya and I sigh. Kudou doesn't pay no mind and continues to enter the house.

Her outward appearance is good. There is no harm in saying she is a beautiful woman. If she walks through the streets, perhaps eight or nine out of ten people would turn their heads. Only by looks, she is beautiful.

I wonder if she will ever have any motivation to do things such as cleaning by herself.

"Did you get mad or something?"

"Who does she think she is? She's not just anyone."

She's simply not interested in cleaning. Coming from a real person.

I don't know what I should think about that.

"Anywho, I noticed your movements getting better during combat."

"Really?"

"Mhm."

Even though we once fought with our backs straight, we should have never fought with our faces staring at the ground.

As I thought, when I look at Miss Francesca and Mururu getting along, I see faces full of confidence. It is called a *doya*-face. Of course, this word does not exist in this world.

When I turned to Aya and Feirona to see what happened, they seemed to understand Mururu's facial expression, as I gave off a bitter smile.

"I tried asking what things Renji doesn't like." [Mururu]

"What kind of image are you trying to give off?" [Renji]

When Mururu said that, Miss Francesca scratched her face like she was troubled.

"Well. I dislike things my partner dislikes. Don't worry about remembering that." [Renji]

"Next time I'll win." [Miss Francesca]



“I’m not going to fight anymore. I’m tired” [Renji]

[Again, with that....]

Rather than that, I don’t know what will happen the next time we fight.

It is best to not fight in situations where you know you can win, but reality isn’t that sweet. So, it is common to create situations where there is a high probability of winning — but when I won this time, I did not fight fairly. Next time I might not get those odds.

Miss Francesca is a hard worker. She is not a person who will give up easily. I understood that well from the past six months.

That is why I will not fight.

Even if she is a disciple, losing to her, a mere child, will hurt my pride.

It seems in the past I felt the same way.

“Well then, why don’t you work in exchange for the sword Kudou just made you?” [Renji]

“Uh..yes, sorry.” [Miss Francesca]

“Geez.”

As I raise my voice, Miss Francesca apologizes, Aya gets shocked, and Mururu pokes me with her fists.

Shrugging my shoulders at her timidness, I walk back into the house with Sollunea. Or rather, I walked in by myself but Sollunea joined my side.

“What’s wrong?” [Renji]

“Renji, what’s a tsundere?” [Sollunea]

“.... Ask Aya.” [Renji]

That said, there is no sign of movement from Sollunea. I stare at her, waiting for a response.

I recently got used to this, but her silent beauty makes me feel uneasy. It has been a long time since I have felt this way.... It’s like when I first met Ell.

(T/N: Ell is a nickname for Ermenhilde.)

I think about such a thing and shake my head. What on earth am I thinking?  
Annoying.

[I want to ask you something Renji.]

“Is that so?”

“Yes.”

Apparently, it seems I was right.

As I looked up at the ceiling and sighed, I felt someone near the door. It is probably Aya listening in.

“Why again?”

For me, there is no choice but to ask.

No matter who I hear it from, it would be the same.

[You can't tell anybody.]

“Of course.”

Shrugging my shoulders, I expect something, but I look back at unreadable eyes.

Now then, what is the explanation for this?